

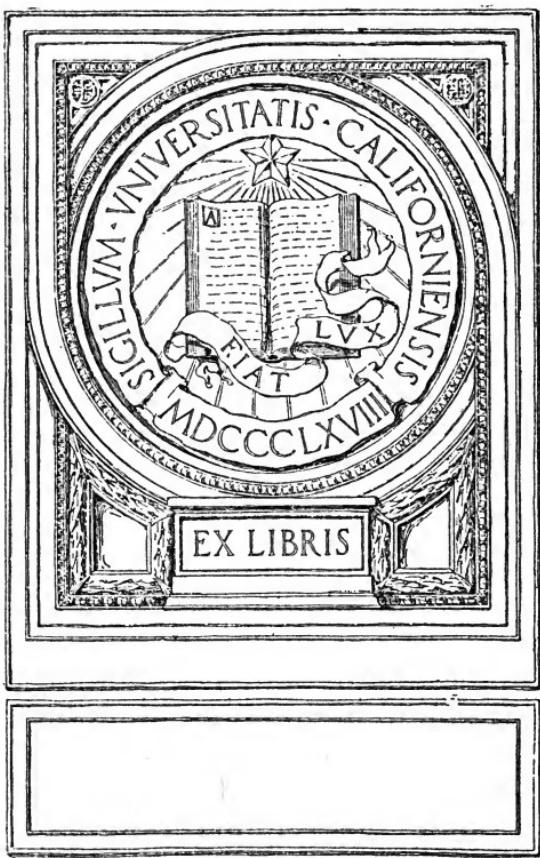
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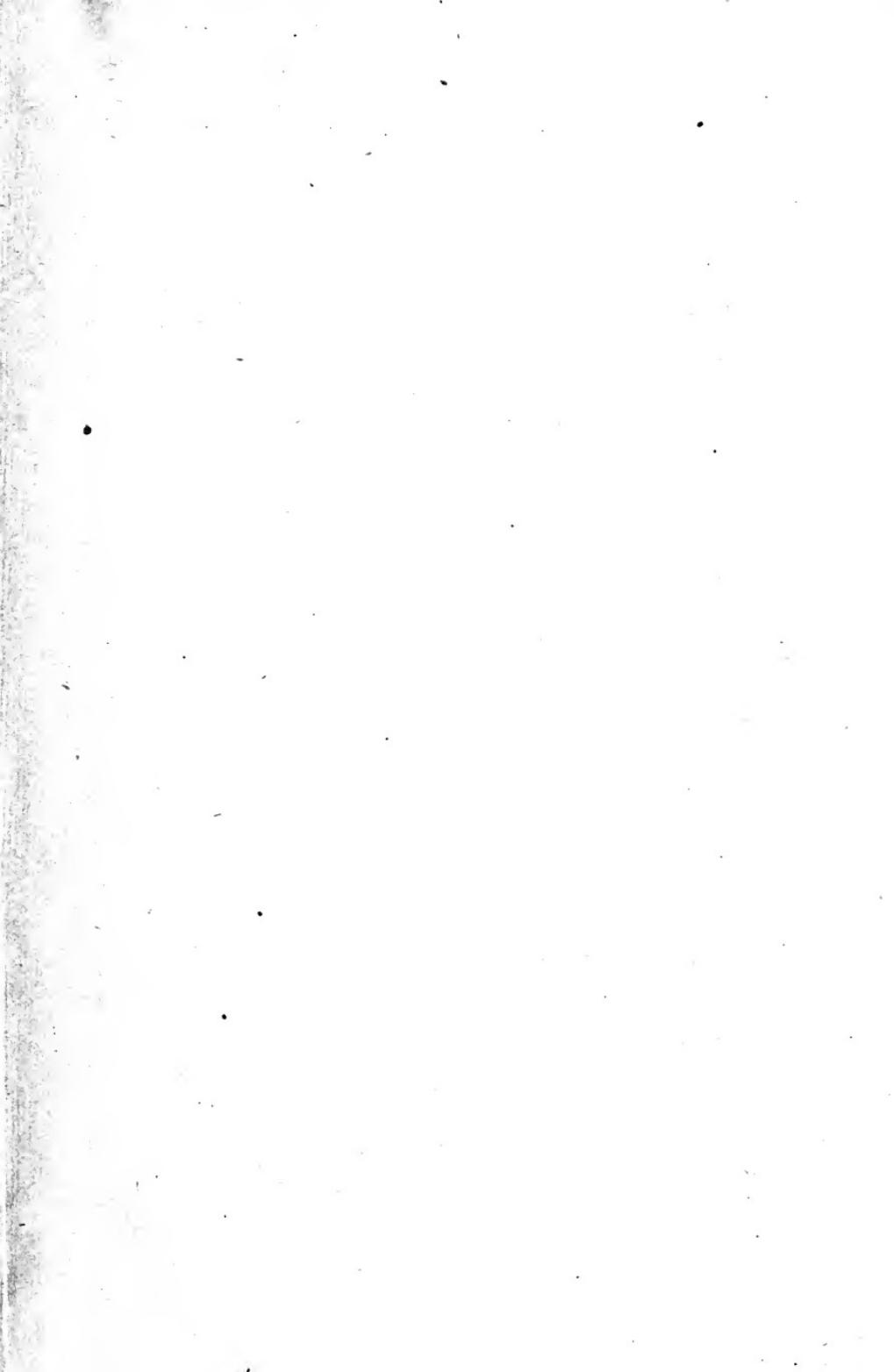
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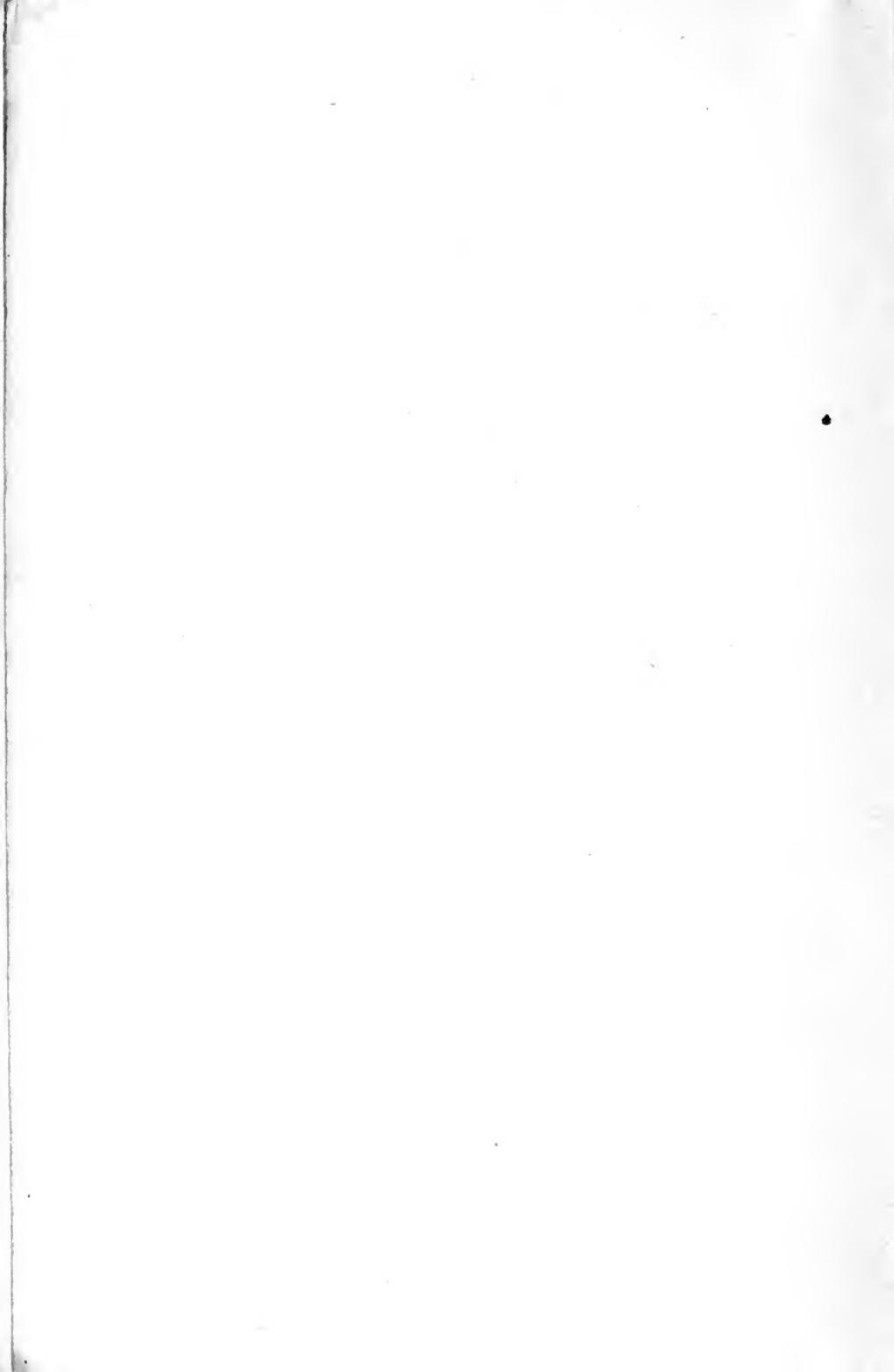
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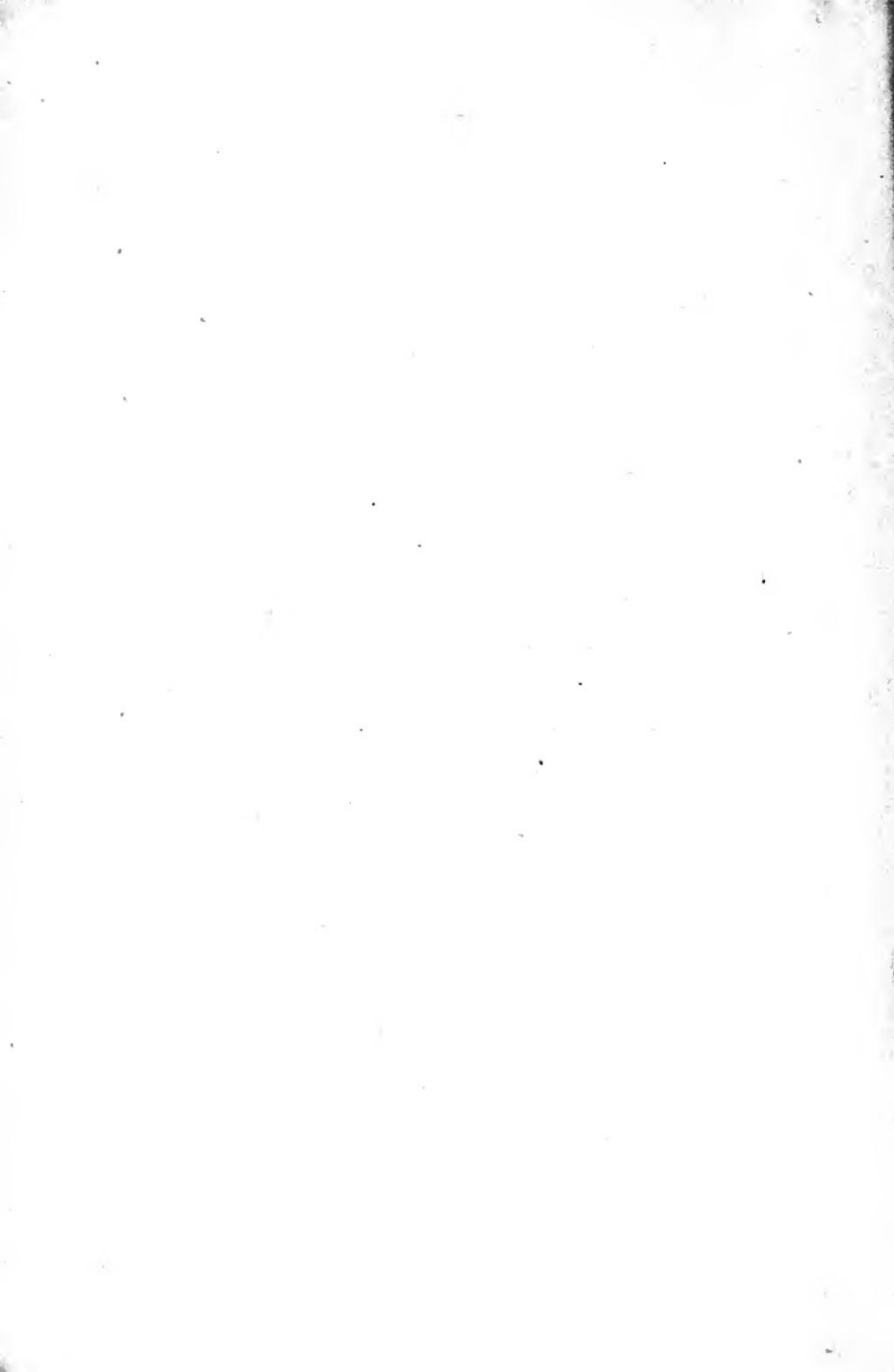


IF WE RETURN

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IF WE RETURN
LETTERS OF A SOLDIER
OF KITCHENER'S ARMY
BY G. B. MANWARING 

LONDON : JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD
NEW YORK : JOHN LANE COMPANY MCMXVIII



PREFATORY NOTE

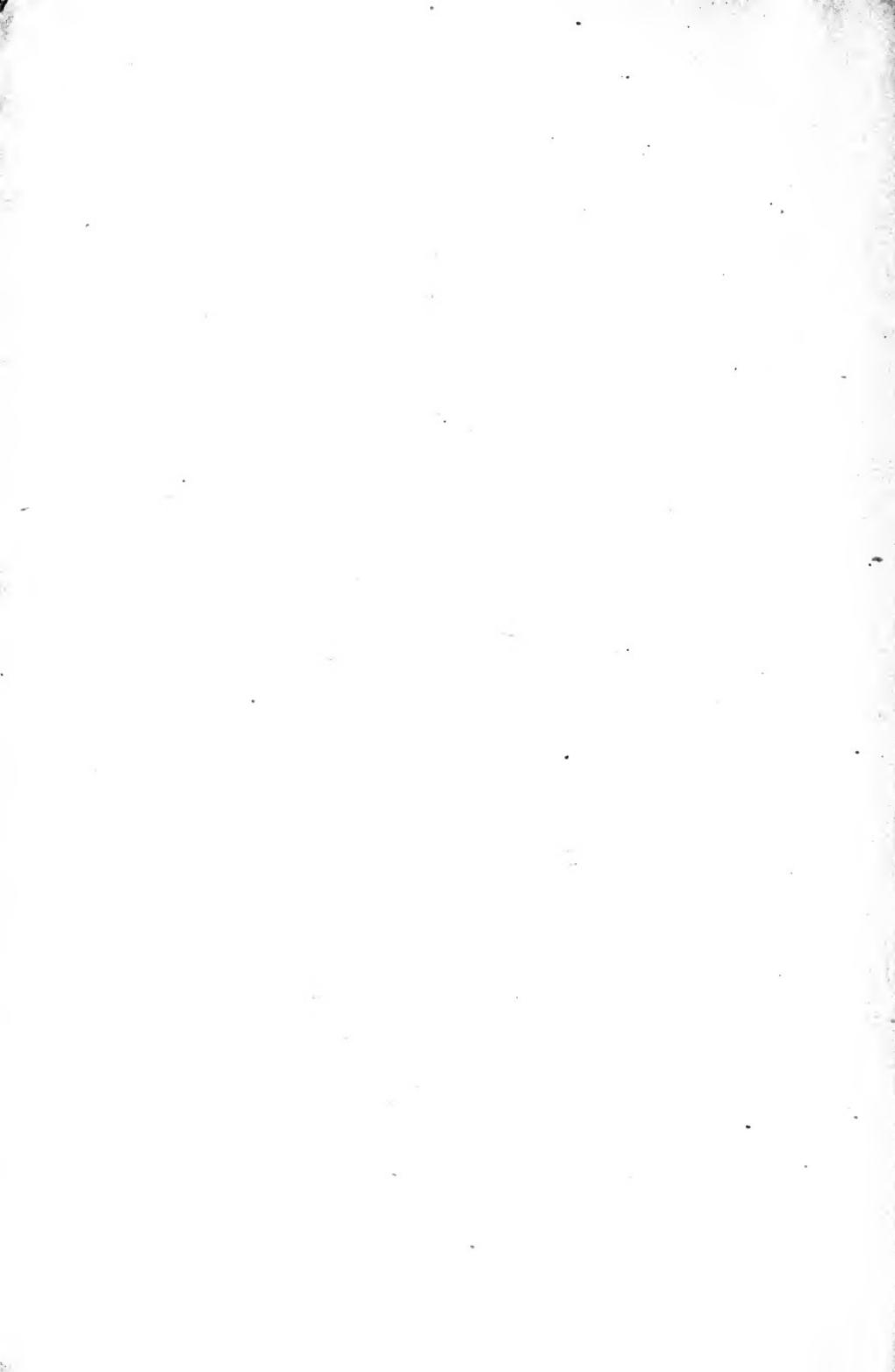
THE letters of which this volume consists were written by a young officer of Kitchener's Army, without any thought or intention of their publication. No attempt has been made to edit, alter or revise them, and except for the omission of a few sentences, mainly of purely personal interest, they are printed in the form in which they were received.

Such merit as they may possess lies in the fact that they are, what they appear to be, hurriedly noted records of thoughts and impressions written from various parts of France—from the Base, Rest Billets, Reserve Line, Front Line, Casualty Clearing Station and Hospital.

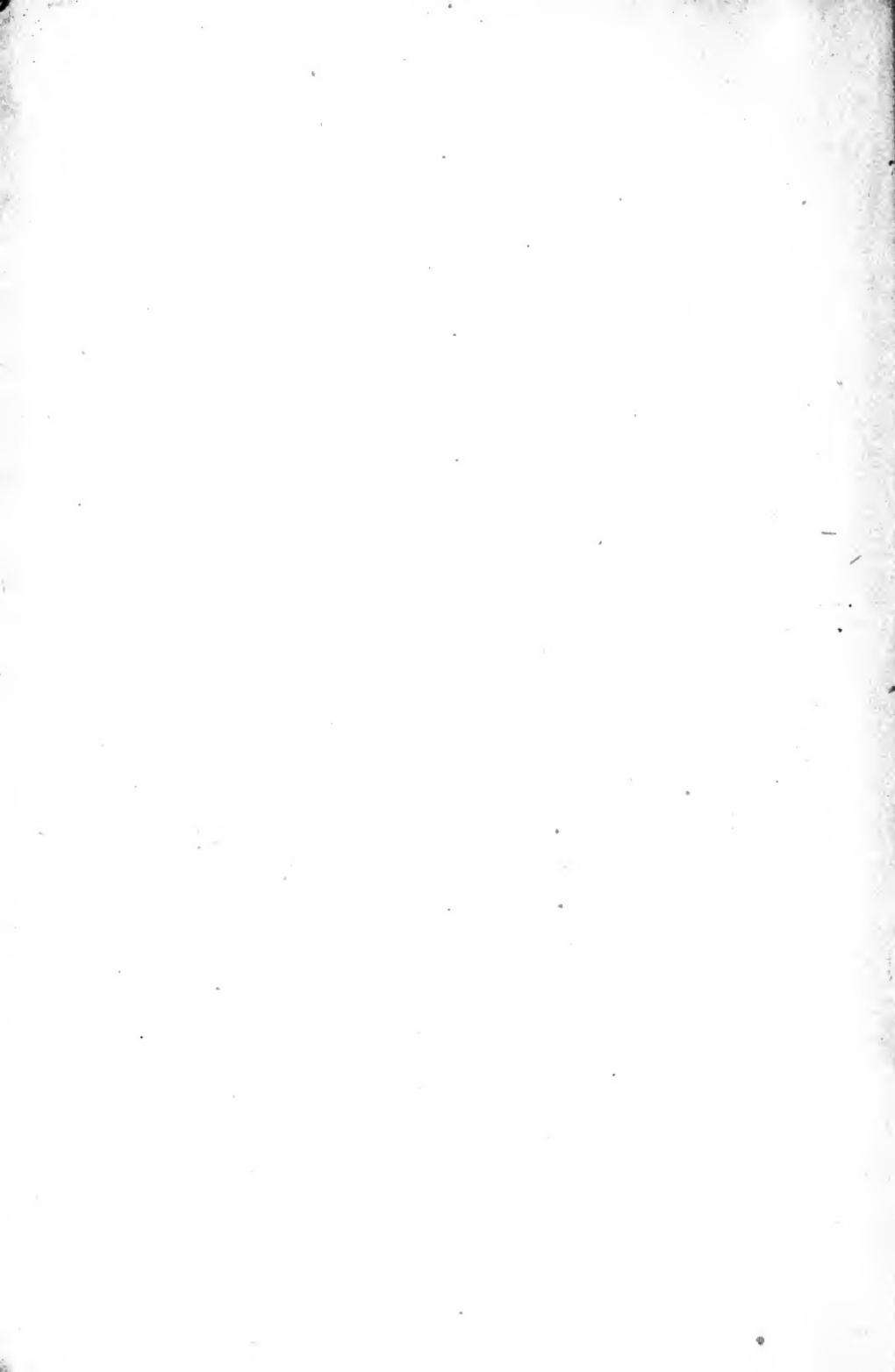
The period extends over the summer and autumn of 1917. The precise dates of the letters are omitted.

The title of the book is taken from a rondeau by Lieut. F. W. Harvey of the Gloucestershire Regiment.

At the date of publication the author was still on active service abroad, and had no opportunity of revising the proofs.



IF WE RETURN



I

AS far as possible, in my letters, I will try to give you my impressions of the War as they strike me.

My great impression of to-day is the casual way, or apparently casual way, in which men set out to the great game of war—amused and slightly bored—that, and the smiling faces of the few English girls who saw them off. My train went second, and as they turned away, tears sprang to their eyes, which they were too proud to wipe away, and with heads high they walked away. England is a good country to live for, and a good country to die for.

As England vanished in the mists and smoke one realised how dear it all is, and the utter longing for peace flooded one's soul. How we shall appreciate it all when we get back !

And the contrast from last night to this ; from a well-cooked dinner to some beans and half-cold meat, eaten with a tin knife and fork at the oilcloth-covered table of a Salvation Army Hut ! From the comforts of civilisation to the rough life here ! And yet somehow though one loses the comforts, one also loses the disadvantages, the pettiness and crudeness of a mammon-loving people. Though I've only been here a few hours I see the change (more marked perhaps since I am among colonials ; Australians lunched with me and Canadians share my tent). Here one gets a wider outlook with vast spaces around one, and equality. Here one has a taste of what Empire means. In the next enclosures Indians of varied Castes look with strange wonder on English, Colonial, Scotch, Irish, Belgian, American, French. Truly a brotherhood of nations, and one wonders if Tennyson's dream is at hand, and we shall see " in the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world."

Speaking of *Locksley Hall* puts me in

mind of this morning's raid. I hope you escaped all right.

Evening is drawing in, and as we have no lights I must close. I'll write when I can, but not regularly at stated times, for then should a pause come you might think that something was wrong.

It isn't easy to go away from all one loves, but I go gladly, for here is a chance to answer Browning's question, "How can I help England?"

II

WELL, here I am at the Base; you'd hardly believe it, but it took seven hours to get here, about twenty-five miles. There's not much news, but I thought you'd like a letter. This is not a wildly exciting place. K—— is stationed here, also D—— who was at Haileybury with me, one or two familiar faces about, but otherwise nothing of interest. The thing that strikes one most in France is the quantity of black. I know that it is worn much more than in England, but it is a depressing sight. Why do people, especially widows, parade their grief and depress others in this way?—to grieve, I suppose, is human, but not this show. And the little children, too—it's too bad. The weather, too, is rotten, cold and damp—more like November than July. No more now.

III

I HAVE been posted to the — Batt., so look out in the Gazette. I shall stay here probably till the end of next week.

The life here is distinctly good, in its own strange way, enough work to fill your day, 7.30 a.m. to 5 p.m., though sometimes, such as to-night for example, one is at it from 5.45 p.m. to 12 noon; but in those cases the rest of the afternoons both before and after is one's own. This afternoon I am going into —, about four miles away, where I dined last night. There's a splendid spirit of comradeship and optimism. The general feeling here puts the end of hostilities much earlier than I do,

but then one never knows, one can only pray for the best. I have a strange feeling that I shall see you much sooner than any of us think.

My love to you all.

IV

WITH all its privations and little hardships, which, after all, are nothing to speak of, I like this life. I am getting fitter and browner day by day. What are the privations? To live in the open? Surely not in the semi-tropical sunshine—just to march about under a broiling sun, carrying more weight than is comfortable and to wear always a tin hat! That, and the chafe of having rules and regulations. Here one takes life at its true value; wealth loses its significance and health becomes one's primary asset. A corn, a touch of pain, count as a loss of money. Behind is the wealth of civilisation, in front the nameless quality of war. Surely we who come back will do so with new standards and new ideals, and so the countless sacrifice will not have been in

vain. And to those who don't return, what after all are ten, twenty, thirty, even forty years off a man's life viewed in the light of all eternity? Just one drop in the ocean, just the loss of so much pleasure, so much pain, just the chance to atone, "Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears of pain, darkness and cold." How strange it is to think that after all one is fighting for the freedom of one's enemies. All night long the guns boom out up the line not many miles away, and all night long train after train takes its load to the railheads. Death and destruction for the freedom of those to whom we are dealing it out !

"To-day's needs," as they say in St. James's Street, a portable drinking cup, a tin of Eno's, oil to keep flies off, and a fly strafer.

The work here is naturally hard, generally 7.30 to 4 p.m., but one gets whole afternoons and even days off, and then to the coast to bathe, and imagine that one is just here for a summer holiday. The

other afternoon I spent on the dock side; it was a revelation and an education. Men from Fiji, China, Japan, Soudan, India, Burmah, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Belgium, England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, U.S.A., Portugal, and prisoners from Germany and Austria, French Colonials from Algiers—all working away as units in the mighty mechanism that can take a heavy gun from a ship and have it pouring shells into the German lines just a few hours after. Truly the British Nation is one of the wonders of the world.

Another thing, fancy cakes and tarts for tea; excuse the bathos, but these letters are just impressions to serve me as reminders when Peace comes. One learns instinctively to use the capital P. It seems so distant and so sacred, the idea of Peace again.

V

TO be in the Army in France in 1917 is a privilege that one ought to be very thankful for, not the patriotic privilege of being allowed to pay back a little of one's debt to civilisation, nor that of the gift of perfect health which is our lot out here, but an intellectual privilege of an education, a broadening of outlook for those who care to use it. Yesterday, I spent the day at a French Watering Place, and saw the reality of the Entente Cordiale. Take one example; there was a party of two ladies in deep black—the tragically predominant colour out here—two girls of about twenty, children and two ser-

geants of England, all at play together; and this was typical all over the beach. Tommies of all nationalities, but especially English, mixed freely with the native pleasure-seekers, speaking that strange language of French and English and universal international slang which is current out here. Coinage of any nation and any value is current in this cosmopolitan place. What a change war has made, apart from the international upheaval and the mingling of races of which I wrote before: one sees these English Tommies who probably never left their native village and to whom life was bounded by the village pastures, and thought by the chatter of the village pub; one can see these same men swaggering about perfectly at home in Continental towns; talking of London and Paris; sitting in Cafés or Estaminets hearing stories of the world from those who have been pioneers in strange lands, citizens of strange cities, and one wonders what will be the end, the great result! When Peace comes how will these men, steeled by the horror

of war, tempered by the close familiarity of death in its most gruesome form, whose minds have been broadened to an extent unrealised before, how will these men treat life in the village pub again? How many of those who have tasted the joys of free life and fresh air, who have dabbled in the great passions of the world, in love and lust, in hunger, thirst and war, "where life means strife and strife means knife," how will they take it all again? Must not the very foundations of our social life be uprooted—our ideas shattered and rebuilt—I wonder!

Another side of the pathos of war came home to me last night, as I lay in my blankets on the tent floor. Two men were talking outside, one due for dear old England to-day, being asked by the other to go to Tottenham Court Road to find a certain squalid court and ask for his mother as he had not heard from her for three months, and although the other knew that it meant a day wasted, he promised gladly. Thank God for comradeship! Letters mean

a lot out here, the coming of the English mail is a great event. Well, no more now; I am too busy to read this through or make corrections.

My love to all.

VI

WHAT a waste of opportunity ! Were the men only here who have the gift of letters what a wealth of literature might result ! But we, whose aim in life is training, and to whom other things are secondary, have no time to hunt for words and phrases, no time to balance sentences or polish off our prose; at most we can but hastily jot down a few of the thoughts and impressions that remain with us till the evening brings us an hour or two of ease.

It would seem as though most of those who come over here have a dual personality, a dream-life and a real one. To some the life of England is the dim and half-remembered dream; now lost, now flashing with startling vividness on the "inner eye"; to them the war is the real

life, and on the whole they are the happier, I think. To others, the life that lies behind is the real, while that of to-day is a dream, often a nightmare, but a dream from which we shall awake some day. Many a time here I have found myself wondering if this or that is really happening, and if I were real. I feel as though my real self were sleeping in that England I love so much. Were it not for this should we be as contented, I wonder? There is an extraordinary freemasonry of districts here, men claiming each other as comrades from the same districts, either by their badges, or more often by their speech. But the greatest brotherhood I have found is that of Lancashire. In the — Regiment, any private may speak to any officer of any of its battalions, and yet with it all there's no lack of discipline. I've found the stiffest unbend and the most stand-offish thaw because they and I claim the same home county. That is a great step onward, for others now are following the lead.

Men say that Religion has failed. I think not, but rather just as life has been shorn of its falseness, its petty tyrannies—so religion is being stripped of its creeds and dogmas, and man is learning in all things to grasp essentials. Here one sees men up against the big things of life, and yet touched by a simple faith that would put many a so-called Christian to shame. One sees half-shy soldiers quietly slip into some church as though to look round, and yet if one watches them one finds more than that. I am not saying that this is universal, but probe deep enough below the surface of everyday life and it is there. The age of chivalry is not dead nor nearly so. Some day I may tell you of the great unselfishness of life.

What a pathetic picture a war cemetery is—just its rows of little crosses, some of stone, some of wood—most just bearing a name, and some that best epitaph of all, “Here lies an English Soldier.” One wonders what motives moved the minds of those who lie so peacefully in this “Norman

country-side" to come here. To some perhaps death came as the great release, to others as the greatest sacrifice. Many came seeking glory and found it. And surely these must have found atonement, whatever their lives may have been. And on the last great Judgment Day, surely the testimony of the cross of sacrifice shall outweigh the damning chain of evidence against them, and in a new kingdom they shall be as little children once again.

Many of those who survive will not go back again, for I have found many who mean to make this new land of France their home. Some starting afresh, others marrying French girls, and all cementing this bond of union to which each day adds a link in the chain that binds England and France together.

There is another side of the war, however, a side of which no one thinks or speaks save under pressure, a side that needs no notes nor letters to recall it to one's memory.

" And they do well to hide their Hell,
For in it things are done
That Son of God nor son of man
Ever should look upon."

And in case I, too, cannot speak of it when I face it, let me write just a little of it now, not with any idea of shocking you, but so that this record may be as complete as possible. I could write for hours on the stories that I have gleaned, stories I know to be true, for men who remember and speak do not exaggerate. But one will suffice.

One of the best characteristics of the British soldier is his unfailing love of children, and it does one's heart good to watch them at play on the beach, or in the gardens of French cottages. A man who loves children can't go far wrong.

Love to you all.

VII

I JOIN the Front Line within the next forty-eight hours. I have often wondered what one's feelings would be when ordered to take one's place at the front, but orders last night left me cold. Beyond a vague curiosity regarding new experiences which lie in front of me, I seem to have fallen into that state of semi-coma that is typical out here. Curiosity, expectation and hope, these in a mild form are there, but little else.

What an insight into human nature a day in the Censor's office gives one. Here one touches as it were upon the fringe of human emotion, one reads the thoughts of those with whom one would never come in contact. One sees the crude philosophy of lives removed by social barriers from one's own—one sees and one marvels.

Naturally such revelations are confidential and must be treated as such, but the educational value remains just the same. Just as the Cinema has, in a way, revealed the dramatic powers of the race, so such letters reveal in a startling way its literature. Naturally such are but as embryos, but they lie dormant there all the same, only waiting for the chance of a training, to find expression. The golden age of literature and drama is not past—for it has yet to come.

To-day I have seen the social side of war—at a Fête, which comprised sports, a horse-show and an aviation meeting. I saw people of all classes and many races mingling. My one regret is that so few real impressions stand out from the throng, but perhaps in the future these may sort themselves out. Above all, I saw the soul of the people rise triumphant above the horrors of war. I saw those who had faced it, and those who were yet to do so, mingling with women who had given their all, and yet cheerfulness was the predominant

note. And now I know what Tennyson means—

“A people’s voice ! We are a people yet. . . .
We have a voice with which to pay the debt
Of boundless love, and reverence and regret,
To those great men who fought and kept it ours,
And keep it ours, O God, from brute control.
O Statesmen, guard us, guard the eye, the soul
Of Europe.”

There can be no peace till that is assured. I saw, too, how in physique the people of that island race of ours stand out above the other races, and I realised once again our gifts and our responsibility. There, too, I saw men masters of the animal world, and, if one may say so, of the air, for I saw horses mastered by men, and machines that copied each detail of the tumbler pigeon’s art. Never shall I cease to be thankful for that chain of circumstances which made me a spectator and will make me an actor in the greatest drama of the human race. For we stand on the eve of great events, and more than we dream of may hang on what the next few months may bring forth. A strange

picture—outside the gaudy, happy throng with bands playing and all the pageantry of a martial peace—inside music and laughter, and yet one knows that were all these suddenly stilled, out of the eastern distance would come the boom of guns.

At times such as last night war comes nearer, for every now and then an enemy machine finds its way here, and I lay in my tent watching the flashes of guns and listening to the patter of shrapnel as it fell around.

Send me, please, a small Browning and a small Tennyson, for literature will be a great help in the life that lies ahead.

VIII

TRAVELLING in France these days is slow, and not always sure; that is, one is not sure of anything. We set out yesterday at noon, armed with three and a half days' rations, to reach a destination known as "The Front." We were very lucky at first, our train being only two hours late—this would never do, so they managed to put in another three-quarters of an hour before starting, only to stop again in fifty yards. We then rather created a record by going seventeen miles without a stop (when it did come they chose a tunnel for the purpose). Off again till we came to a place where many lines run side by side. We were then only four hours behind time, so we put in an

hour and three-quarter's stop where we had "tea"! Do you know how to make tea, I wonder? Take enough of the tea mixture (supplied by the Army, consisting roughly of five parts of moist sugar to two of inferior tea) to cover the bottom of a mess tin, then walk to the front of the train; this is generally about 700 yards away, since one is sure to be in the last carriage (that is an advantage when the engine falls off the line, for one can't be expected to help to put it on—but as a rule this only happens about twice a week), then in your best French ask the driver for some hot water. If successful in your request, a blast of steam suddenly issues from an unexpected quarter in the side of the engine, shortly followed by a fountain of hot, if slightly brackish water. Suspend the tin by a handkerchief under this, and after leaving it for a few minutes to "draw," one's tea is ready. The more fortunate ones soak an old condensed milk tin in the stew to obtain cream. If one doesn't take sugar one is done.

Notes for beginners—Engines of other trains though nearer should be avoided, as although not fast, even troop trains require catching and a tin of hot “ tea ” is a handicap.

In travelling, unless one knows the line, avoid travelling on the roof or footboard, for the roof of a tunnel is often low, and the signals give little clearance.

About eight o’clock, having travelled nearly forty miles, we arrived at our rest camp, and stored our baggage. There was nearly a casualty from gassing, as our kit had come in a manure truck. Hot baths, dentists, and chiropodists have filled my day—for civilisation has been reached and I look forward to a five-course dinner ! I’ve been here before.

IX

TO-DAY I've been exploring. There is a tram here not unlike the Laxey trams, and in this I set out. We soon left the squalid outskirts of the town behind, and travelled along one of those long, uninterestingly straight roads that are characteristic of France. Soon, however, we left this and swung into the cool depths of the forest that lies between us and a watering-place that nestles amid the sand dunes on this northern coast of France. Here the track left the road and ran in one of those sunken weed-grown tracks side by side with it and yet apart. Here, too, the road twists and turns and one can picture oneself back in England once again. The forest keeps alternating in character, now a tangle of dense undergrowth, now

pines rising from a carpet of pine needles, and beyond, the blue and silver flash of the distant sea. As we swung round the last bend a wave of home-love rushed through me, so home-like was the picture. The same sand-dunes with the same coarse grass and shrubs and in the distance the red and blue of the sea-side town, and the sweet, fresh smell of the sea. It might have been —— from the golf-links, or as one sees it first from the train, only the buildings are more picturesque, the roads narrower and half paved, but one looks in vain for gardens and for lawns. From here one sees straight up the Channel, and the smoke of unseen steamers hangs heavy in the air—steamers plying to and fro in that marvellous service, that all the ingenuity of Germany as yet has failed to stir. From this I came back to the dentist, and here again I was moved to wonder at the thoroughness of the organisation as our wonderful army goes to war.

Last evening I walked up the hills to

one of those gigantic hospitals that are springing up all over France. It was a wonderful sight, a mass of laid-out gardens and comfort for the broken soldiers, here amid the pine-clad dunes. A perfect evening with the afterglow of sunset still in the western sky reflected in a hundred pools of colour in the sea below. Here as one looked down, the lights of the vast camp began to twinkle, and one could catch, now the sound of some band, now the shrill notes of the bagpipes or the softened notes of a bugle call. A sight to move one to pity when one thought of the reason for it all.

I have nothing to do these days, save just to wait and wait for orders, which never seem to come, and of all the war, waiting is the most trying game. Give me the release of action rather than the vegetation of expectancy. Do my letters change much? I suppose they vary with my moods, for I write just what comes into my head, and sometimes I find my pen rambling on and on, trying to keep

pace with thoughts that flash across my brain, and yet I am not conscious of any action, any impulse—thoughts seem to come uncalled for, and a few of them find their way somehow on to paper. Truly this is a dream life.

I have learnt to look forward to dreams, for nearly every night they carry me back to the land of yesterday, or to the kingdom of the future. Here I meet old friends in strange surroundings, and yet vividly real. Here, too, from time to time, I seem to meet friends I have never made—shall I meet them and know them somewhere? I wonder.

You see I get no letters now, as no one knows where I am—here to-day—gone perhaps to-morrow—and yet I know that these letters will eventually find me—such is the wonder of our organisation. Poetry is a wonderful companion, and I can never thank you enough for teaching me to love it as I do. I can never be lonely—not really alone—for wherever I go and whatever I do the poets go with me, and from

the whirlpool of memory are surging always to the surface to say their say, and sink again.

Browning, above all, for in him I find every thought I've ever tried to think—couched in language more perfect than any words I could ever frame.

“ We substitute, in a fashion,
For Heaven—poetry.”

I love Beauty—whether in sound or colour or form, it stands almost as a religion, whose gospels are creations of the beautiful—whose apostles are the great artists, whether of music, art or literature. I would that I knew more of them, for I can only grope on the fringes of the crowded commonplace.

“ Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds
From the hid battlements of Eternity;
These shaken mists a space unsettle, then
Round the half-glimpsèd turrets slowly wash again.”

To-day I live in dreams, to-morrow perchance in grim reality.

“ Another year ! Another deadly blow,
Another mighty empire overthrown,
And we are left—or shall be left—alone,
The last that dares to struggle with the foe.”

There is probably more of the real ego in these letters than in any I have ever written, for until now—except perhaps when I have been in the depths or on the heights—I have been too shy of writing, but in the upheaval of the universe shyness is dwarfed and

“ Each in his separate star
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It
For the God of Things as they are.”

Are there too many quotations in these letters? If there are they have become a part of me. I dare not attempt to write verse now, for all unknowingly others' verses creep in, verses to which I can lay no claim to authorship, and that can never be. I am out for new experiences, and go about with hands outstretched to take all that come my way. And so I arranged to fly. I made friends with a brilliant Belgian aviator, and on Monday last was

going for a flight. We pushed the machine out, and started the engine only to find that it did not develop sufficient power, and so the chance went by. Ah well, "Fear nothing, make the best of everything."

My love.

X

I (THEORETICALLY) continue my journey at 7 a.m. to-morrow—practically I suppose we shall be under way by noon. Anyway, I expect that it will be another humorous episode—most continental journeys are at present. To-day, I've made further explorations of the forest and sea-shore—there are great possibilities in the place as a Peace-time resort, but at present it looks like a London Sunday in the off season. What an extraordinary thing habit is—not only does one learn to take steps after a few days, and to turn instinctively to the right or left as the case may be—but there are other things. For instance, last night I slept indoors, for the first time since leaving England, and despite

the spring bed, the sheets, the roof, somehow I didn't sleep as well as I do with nothing but a bit of canvas above me, with the stars peeping through the open door—or the rain splashing on my face. That above me, and a doubled blanket on the board below.

It is too hot to write. I can feel a steady stream down the inside of my vest. Never have I seen so many flies.

XI

A VERY pleasing country is this sunny land of France—that is, when it is sunny; all day to-day, however, it has been thundering and the rain coming down in sheets—but yesterday was a perfect day. All through one saw the interest of war at the back of the Front, here a herd of tanks grazing in a field, there a patrol of Indian Cavalry. The journey yesterday was better, we had three and a half hours in a French town for lunch and arrived about six. I commandeered a R.E. limber, and joined my Battalion about seven. The Battalion is out for a month's rest and training behind the lines. It occupies a wooded French village and there's little sign of war. At night there is the constant flash of guns like

distant lightning, and every now and then the dull rumble of bombardment, but though we are one-third of the distance nearer the line than we were before, the fire is not so pronounced, as here no violent bombardment is taking place. I am sleeping at a farm, dirty but not uncomfortable. There is the constant noise of the so-called domestic animals, and one's sleep is broken by visits from rats, mice, hens, cats and kittens, via one's window. I am in an old wooden double bed with sheets.

I enclose the programme of an entertainment—but the whole country is a “Pageant of Empire” better than any stage can produce.

XII

IT'S extraordinary how easily one becomes accustomed to new conditions. This war has shown the wonderful adaptability of the average man to circumstances and situations of which he has seldom, if ever, dreamed. The first day perhaps is strange, but after that, habit is formed, and one seems naturally to settle down again. The weather at present is beyond words, since Sunday it has hardly stopped raining, and naturally one's spirits are damped with the climate. Still, we can't grumble. To-morrow sees me on the move again, for I proceed to Army Headquarters for a course in a branch of warfare which seems to be coming more and

more to the front, as fast as genius or infamy allows. For some reason there is no mail to-day, and we are sad in consequence, for we look forward daily for the little links with home, that remind us that somewhere beyond our ken are other lives and places where Peace still reigns to a greater or less degree. There is nothing more interesting to us out here than the trivial little details of home life. I've done this village—that does not take long, I can assure you. The country about is beautiful, for here one meets fields of varied and vivid colour that one seldom found at home. But with all its attractions it can't come up to dear old England. Here we are in a backwater of war, and but for the distant boom of the guns that comes sometimes, it is less like war than many villages at home,—the quiet, placid vegetable life goes on.

How hard it is to write to mothers, sisters, wives and fiancées, who have not heard from loved ones, and who will never hear again, only those who have to do it can

know. I am sad at heart to-night with the reflected misery that comes from letters I must write. Such is life, and such is death.

Good-night.

XIII

BEING backwatered in a village does not give much scope for expression or material for letters, but now that I am on the move again I can write. I left — (some day perhaps I shall be able to fill in these gaps) at 2 p.m. and after an hour's drive arrived at —. The drive led through open undulating country, well-wooded in parts, and in each of these woods one caught a glimpse of the picturesque red roofs of a village, and now and then the white walls of a château. Generally, it was a case of distance lending enchantment to the view, for on arrival the villages lose their picturesqueness and assume an air of squalor and dirt. Every now and then, however, the picturesqueness remains even

in the village streets, and one sees some of the beauty of Northern France about which one has heard and read so much. I got to a wayside station at 3 p.m., to find, as usual, that there was an hour to wait—and it was raining hard. However, when a grateful Government is paying for a holiday abroad, it seems a pity not to see all that there is to be seen, and so I set out, and I was glad I did, for the humour of seeing English Tommies at home was worth it. Here and there one saw a woman, a child or an old, old man—but all the rest were English Tommies, gathering harvest, mending roads and doing the hundred and one jobs of every-day life in a country village—and enjoying it, too. At 4 p.m. we got the train (we, being my servant and I, for here they seem to consider that an officer is incapable of looking after himself if let loose alone—and where you go your servant goes too—I must say they are very useful). As we were not travelling by troop train, the train was only about five minutes late. Apparently, there is no shortage of paper in

France, for my railway ticket is one foot wide and two feet long. At 4.30 we reached our first changing place, and having learned what to expect in the way of connections, I was not surprised to find that there was no train on to the next stop till noon to-morrow. I packed my servant off to the nearest camp, and had tea—a tea such as you can't get in England—as much bread as you want and hot fresh cakes. Thence to a concert, for here one is on the fringe of civilisation. A meal, and here I am writing by candle-light in a commandeered French house.

Before I go further let me pay a tribute to the comfort organisation of the troops in France. All ranks are catered for and all is done that is possible. Above all, I think the Expeditionary Force Canteen rises supreme. I talk of the fringe of civilisation, but even in the wilds we do ourselves well—last night, for instance, our dinner consisted of soup, from fresh carrots, lobster salad, pork chops and fresh vegetables, fruit tart, Welsh rarebit,

coffee. Not bad for a village—or in the current slang, “bon for the troops.” I am really enjoying life in my own strange way—a wonderful motto is that of “keep smiling.”

XIV

I CONTINUED my journey at noon to-day, but it was the least interesting one that I have taken as yet. At first we rose up on the hills, but the view was disappointing, marred by coal mines, and the like, for I travelled through the fringe of the black country. Of all inland towns I have visited this is the best, and in its way it is interesting. Here, too, one sees more of the French, for though British abound, many—in fact most—of the inhabitants remain. I have a very comfortable billet. The bed is strange, standing one foot from the floor, and has a wire cage six feet long, three feet wide and two feet deep, this is entirely filled with mattresses, and on top of this one sleeps. Either all French people are small or else they fold up or take to

pieces before going to bed. I am not sure whether this is a single or a double effort. Round the walls, touching the ceiling, are pictures. Three awful enlargements of family interest, I suppose, four engravings representing murders, and a certificate signed by seven people, apparently stating that some one obtained a first prize for playing a Saxaphone in the year 1898. For the rest there is a chest of drawers, ornamented with two shell cases, two awful pieces of so-called decorative china, and two more photos; a chair and a table. The room is distempered one and three-quarters sides green, one side light blue and the other one and a quarter dirty yellow white, but it is very clean and promises to be comfortable. Outside is a perfect summer evening. On the whole I'm happy and contented, as one man remarked in a letter I was censoring. "Thank God, the war can't last longer than one's lifetime," which, taken all round, is a sound state of mind to be in. I am afraid that there is no doubt about B—— being killed. I met

an officer from his Battalion yesterday, who seemed certain, but I was unable to get any details. Do you remember the —? On reaching the Battalion I found he was Chaplain; we were at school together; two subalterns in my Company I knew before, one was in the Revue we produced two years ago, and the other was once in the same form with me at Haileybury. Please read the casualty lists, and let me know anything concerning my friends—I fear this summer will be costly, and the death-roll high, for both sides will be fighting for an early finish if possible. You have one advantage, for letters reach you more or less regularly, but here, when one is moving about as I am, days and even weeks may pass before I can pick up my mail. Can you place the following quotation, and if so, can you let me have a copy of the poem—

“ If we return, will England be
Just England still, to you and me?
A place where we must earn our bread?
We, who have walked among the dead
And watched the smile of agony.”

And please let me have a copy of *The Soldier*; you know, the one—

“ If I should die, think only this of me.”

Don’t think I am morbid, but somehow the sadness of life, viewed through its gladness, has always appealed to me. Contrasts are always interesting ! As yet I have seen very little of the desolation and ravages of war. Here and there on the roadside a wayside grave, dating back to those early days nearly three years ago, when warfare was open fighting before the Armies went to earth, and the greatest slaughter of the world commenced.

XV

I HAVE, as I mentioned before, a servant, one by name B——, quite young and with a sense of humour—how great I have yet to find out, and until then must remain on my guard, lest worse befall. Yesterday he informed me that he had found a place for officers to have hot showers in (subtle words these), and so I ordered one. I was duly informed that one would be ready at 6 p.m., and at 6 I arrived. My suspicions were aroused when I saw various men carrying pans of hot water into a green tank. I was shown into a room labelled “ Officers Only,” where I undressed. I was

then conducted to another similar room—did I say room?—a misnomer, a tin partition eight feet by four; across the top of this a three-quarter inch pipe ran in the form of a Z. At one angle-piece I saw a disc exactly the size of a penny containing eight small holes. Considerable clattering not unlike a “noise off” proceeded from the upper regions and a strange voice asked if I were ready. On my replying in the affirmative, very slowly and majestically five of the eight holes in the aforesaid penny emitted a slow trickle of water which scattered into drops about six inches below the point of discharge, a sixth hole dribbled at intervals, while the other two remained barren of watery offspring. This was my bath; with the greatest ease I stopped it with my thumb. But more was to come. Finding the water too hot, I asked for cold to be turned on. Two more buckets were carted on to the roof, and a distinct fall in the temperature was obtained. Having stood there for twelve minutes, during which quite two pints fell, I dressed, first

removing a large family of black insects which had spent the day trying to share my underclothes with me. On looking at these they turned their tails over their heads in a haughty manner.

XVI

A NOTHER stage of this journey. This time I came by car—and my word it did rain, but thanks to the coat I kept dry. I am at a farm, which like most French farms is built in the form of a square, the centre of which is apparently a cross between a cattle market and a surface cess-pool. I suppose the house agents would describe it as a healthy country smell, but personally my description would be stronger. We are not far from the line here in the mining country, but owing to the lie of the land they can only shell us from one point, and apparently they are too busy with other matters. I had a topping French dinner, during which what I took to be a

flapper, but discovered to be a war widow, came and talked to me. My French is improving, and somehow no English officer need ever be lonely in these places unless he is shy. I've broken out into verse again, and here is one effort—

“ Beside the roadway, ’midst the grass unmown,
Where wild flowers cast their fragrance in the air,
A simple wooden cross, unnamed, unknown,
Calls on the traveller for a silent prayer.

No more for him shall come the daily round
Behind the plough, or at the office stool;
No more for him shall bugle calls resound,
His days are over at the life-long school.

What hopes, what fears were his we cannot say,
We only know that, on a foreign shore,
He paid the price that many men must pay
E’er Peace shall triumph o’er the God of War.

But, by that simple nameless cross, he won
Atonement for the wayward sins of youth.
His life, perchance, was blackened—it is done !
His death is entered in the Book of Truth.”

My room is approximately twelve feet by six feet, but I can’t grumble, even if at first sight it did remind me of Doré’s

picture of "Don Quixote's quarters at the Inn." My *bête noire* at present is the mosquito—they are so bad in places that many nets are in use, and the worst of it is their bites so often turn septic.

XVII

THREE is little of interest in this village.

To-day armoured cars and cavalry, both English and Indian, have been manœuvring about the district, with aeroplanes assisting. Yesterday I spent at a R.E. H.Q., a delightful place behind the lines, complete with tennis courts and all the luxuries of war. To save a two-day journey, they lent me a car, and after a delightful run, through scenery that in a way reminded me of home, marred though it was by coal mines and ruined villages here and there, I arrived back with the Battalion. It's good to see nature triumphing over the destruction of war, and its bare hideousness clothed with grass and

flowers. For better or worse I have decided that I ought to take up the special work for which my pre-war training fits me and to start again—to lose much that I have gained during the last three years, and, armed with the knowledge that it has brought me, to see how much I can make good again in the months that lie between the present warfare and the future Peace.

At last the sun has broken through the grey skies which have marred the country for the last two weeks—let us hope at any rate that this is an omen of success.

We little guessed, three years ago, how hard and bitter the struggle would be, perhaps we guess as little now of the hardship and bitterness that lie ahead. Perhaps while preparing for months of war we little guess how near Peace may be ! “Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall not be disappointed !” To the lucky ones among us, above the horror of it all, rises the humour of the little things of

life, and it is to these, to a great extent, that we owe the cheerfulness which drives us on. The man who has no sense of humour must feel like one who is doubly damned.

XVIII

LAST night was one of heavy drifting rainclouds, and before going to bed I stood and watched that arc of fire that lies to the eastward, marking the scene of the conflicting forces of mankind. Impressive and awful, and yet without the terror that gun-fire and shell brings, for here the noise was muffled to a low murmur, punctuated every now and then by the dull thud of a bursting shell that fell behind the lines. Arcs of vivid white crept slowly through the air—sudden flashes now green, now gold, and now an angry crimson, from star shell, Very light and gun, from bursting shell and burning farm. An awful yet a wonderful sight—war viewed from peace ! And to the tumult of man's devising, nature,

as though not to be outdone, poured forth vivid lightning flashes, which lit the country-side.

Last night, too, I saw an interesting and amusing sight while watching the faces and ever-changing expressions of the inhabitants, at what must have been their first Pierrot show (and a very good show it was too). The climax came when these good people discovered that the girls—very pretty girls I must admit—turned out to be men !

Why do they mix tea and sugar, I wonder ? It's awfully annoying when one wants the sugar for other things—tea in one's coffee, on one's pancakes or apple tart, and I may tell you it's extraordinarily difficult to separate successfully—we do our best, but still seem full of tea.

Battalion sports took place on Wednesday when I was away. Brigade yesterday—Divisional next Tuesday, with a Rifle Meeting on Saturday or Sunday, so unless something unexpected happens we shall have another clear week's rest at any rate,

Our letters reach us in the evenings, and when one considers the size of the mail one can do nothing but marvel at the wonderful work the Post Office department is doing.

XIX

I WONDER why the Author of the universe ever authorised the creation of flies, fleas, and mud, as well as other creatures and creations that serve no apparent purpose of utility in the world. Ah well, what is must be, but I am afraid that insect casualty lists must be enormous.

April weather in very truth, and football is in full swing. Yesterday we had a Gymkhana—really a most successful affair, but like all else here it was tinged with tragedy, as in the midst of gaiety and sport we saw an English “Sausage” sink in flames some few miles away. I am fortunate in being able to write so often, for I know the time

will come when the gaps between the letters will be longer and the letters themselves shorter. I know that at times, days, and possibly longer, must elapse before letters will come or go, but as with the flies, one must make the best of it. Another side of this war has struck me—how is it going to affect the temporary officers whose lives before were content with Soho and clerkship? For in this democratic army they may have learnt much that is harmful—though much that is ennobling. Will new and richer vistas, of which they have caught glimpses, breed in them a seed of discontent and an exaggerated outlook on the value of riches? Or will they act as a spur to a gentler life, where tastes in dress are modified and the rough edges of uncouth speech filed off? Or will they just go back to what was before? Can life—the sordid vegetable existence that we called life once—fill our lives now that dreams are realities? Will a race of pioneers spring up, and found a nobler brotherhood—or a social upheaval in which much of what is

best will be lost? Never since the foundation of civilisation have there been such possibilities. Never has a race had such chances—but how will it take them? I wonder.

XX

EVENING—without, twilight darkens into night—one of those still summer nights when the inanimate appears to take on a life of its own, when one can almost picture elves and fairies stealing from their hiding-places to frisk and frolic until sunrise calls the so-called living to life again. Outside, earth sleeps and sleeping earth wakes. War is far distant tonight, the dull boom of the guns is muffled and lost in a hundred and one murmurs of the night. Within, I sit alone in the farm; alone, and yet from the next room comes the laughter of young voices, finding cheerfulness now that the day's work is done—such is the eternal heritage of youth. Let me try and paint the scene for you: a

long wooden table covered partly by oil-cloth, partly by a stained table-cloth which has seen better days. A couple of black bottles, some dirty glasses, papers and a scattered pack of cards, a vase of flowers, drooping their heads as though protesting against the sordid ugliness of it all. The daily paper and *Comic Cuts*, that summary of yesterday's news that reaches each company in France. A couple of enamel water-jugs and an untidy pile of books and a smoking oil-lamp. On the opposite walls hang a row of files of papers, a crude coloured picture of the Madonna and Child, and two of those framed certificates without which no house seems to be complete. On the left two windows open into a garden and orchard, and through these steals the heavy perfume of night-scented flowers; between the windows another certificate. Behind is a large cupboard, smelling of damp, and foul from prolonged disuse. A fireplace and overmantel with a huge cracked gilded mirror, and two hideous vases of artificial flowers.

The mantelpiece is covered with a litter of books, papers, shaving tackle and toilet necessaries. Beyond is my wooden bed, over which is another Madonna. The fourth wall is bare, save for two more certificates and a pair of spurs. Against this stands my washhand-stand, a wooden box on which stands a green canvas bucket, and a sponge bag and my valise, while in the further corner, in solemn splendour, rests my tin hat. Scattered about the room are eight wooden chairs. The uneven red-tiled floor is covered with crumpled paper, tobacco ash and the corpses of flies. Boom—a distant gun breaks the silence and suddenly the meaning of it all is borne upon one. A “runner” enters with countless orders, and sleeping men are wakened and dispatched with messages to outlying billets. For here one’s work is never done, by day or night. Such runners enter, breaking into meals or disturbing one’s hard-earned sleep, until one prays just for a few hours to call one’s own, to read or write or dream of the home life that seems

so very far away. Those in England cannot realise what a Company Commander's life is like—even out of the line—its trials and worries and the awful responsibility of it all. Some two hundred men, most of whose education consists in the ploughman's daily round, looking to him for every little thing. Grievances to be settled, justice to be weighed out, financial matters to be adjusted and the great responsibility of life and death, for on his orders men go to meet certain death or wait in comparative safety. When life is cheap it isn't one's own that counts, it's those lives that are dependent on you, and behind them the lives at home in England.

I had two pathetic letters to-day, one from the fiancée of a man to whom I had to break the news of her loved one's death, thanking me—oh, so piteously!—for my kindness, and asking if I could tell her how she could get some souvenir to take with her down the empty years that lie ahead. The other more pathetic still, and yet more touching than any I have ever received.

Let me quote a little of it to you. The writer had lost both husband and brother. This is what she wrote : "Please don't laugh at me, but I am a lonely woman now, and if there is in your Company a lonely soldier who would be glad of letters and cigarettes, do me a kindness and let me have his name." Somehow I found tears in my eyes as I read it, it was so infinitely sad and yet so beautiful.

Oh, the many sides of life that lie in these soldiers' letters ! the pathos of the men whose dear ones are lying ill at home ; messages to children they have never seen and may never see ; words of comfort and hope to mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, wives and sweethearts. Now upbraiding, now consoling. Now joking, full of humour and cheerfulness and never a real complaint against it all, only a devout wish that it may be finished soon. Truly one dips below the surface of life, and we who have seen all this can never be the same careless pleasure-seekers again.

A barking dog heralds the approach of a

'plane. Night after night we hear their drone as they pass to and fro, sometimes lonely wanderers of the air, sometimes in flights or squadrons. At times the anti-aircraft guns bark defiance, at others they pass peacefully away, and all is quiet once again.

XXI

TWO days of perfect summer weather.

A blue sky covered with fleecy white clouds, and a gentle breeze that tempers the heat. A day for holidays were not sterner business afoot. For some days now Fritz has shown a lively interest in our Divisional area. Evenings and early mornings are disturbed by the drone of his engines and the dull boom of his bombs. And even in the daytime little puffs of smoke like baby clouds follow him across the heavens—only by day he flies much higher. We are awfully bucked over the good news in the last three editions of *Comic Cuts*, and one wonders how long it will take before Germany realises that she is beaten. But there seems to be plenty of fight left in her yet !

XXII

ALL things in life, good or bad, from life itself downwards, must reach their ultimate end. Already our rest is more than finished, and we may move anywhere at any time. Whether, when the time comes, we go back to the line, or reserve, or, worst job of all, to working parties, none can say. So far, I've heard nothing more as to my special work—it may not come to anything after all—though it is hardly likely. Personally, I hope that it will not come until I have seen some more infantry work in active conditions. Anyway, I trust the luck that has followed me through life to hold to the end, but whether that luck will take the form of a "Blighty" or an untouched life from now to Peace, remains

to be seen. In any case, new and vaster experiences lie ahead; I feel as though my education were beginning all over again. We have had four days of perfect summer weather, just enough breeze to be cool, and in consequence I have spent long hours in the saddle. A set of cricket things has brought about a change of seasons and football has given way to cricket. Fortunately, we found two separate square yards of level ground about the right distance for wickets, but the pitch between is awful—but “à la guerre comme à la guerre”—and still we keep smiling.

XXIII

WE got up for a 5.15 breakfast yesterday morning, packed up and at 8 a.m. set off. With ten minutes' halt each hour, reached our destination at 12.35 p.m., which was quite good going. Slept for a couple of hours, and then to work again. How long our stay here will be no one knows —with luck we might stay a week, or we might move on to-night. My present billet is an upstairs bedroom at a lodge of a château, standing well back in a wooded park. In front the country stretches away to the battle-line amid slag-heaps, pit-heads, and all the ugliness of the black country. By day, gun-flashes dotted about denote the position of hidden emplacements, while by night a row of lights makes a well-

defined line, broken by flashes of guns and bursting shells, and every now and then by gold or silver rain. By night, the traffic in front of my billet is almost ceaseless, as for the first time since leaving the Base I am near a town, and I hope to get into it before we leave, as I require some new kit. In spite of only moving in yesterday, two posts have arrived bringing me a total of six letters. For comfort we are much better off, my billet being the cleanest and most comfortable I've had yet, though it lies on the other side of the park from the men and the mess, which has both advantages and the reverse. Here all the civilians have to carry gas masks if over five years old. I suppose it's as well to be on the safe side.

XXIV

AN April day of shower and sunshine and wind. Yesterday the C.O. sent for me and the next senior Captain, and showed us the orders that will enable us once again to justify our existence. He told us to take a day off and explore, so after an early lunch we started. Clad in equipment, gas helmets and masks, tin hats, and carrying revolvers, the first part of our journey was on horseback, through the black country that lies to the eastward, the road winding amid slag-heaps and pit-heads, and through little squalid mining villages. As we went eastward the houses showed more and more traces of shell-fire, while every now and then we met the notice, "These cross-roads are registered,

troops may not halt here." At last we came into the gas zone proper, and on through the wilderness, where the second line lies. Traffic here had all but subsided. On to another town, where we found the road under repair, a shell having caught the side of it the previous day; still on, on horses for another quarter of a mile, amid that maze of seeming toy railways that have sprung into being here. Here we dismounted, and donning our tin hats, which previously had been slung, and adjusting our respirators, we proceeded on foot. A new country this, a country of ghosts of trees and houses. Villages, more than half ruined, and trees torn off a few feet from the ground, broke the landscape which rolled, a desolate wilderness, to where little puffs of smoke and chalk-dust showed the German lines. Here two may walk with impunity, but groups of more call for attention from the German guns. A strange, weird, pathetic scene, this Front about which one hears so much. I will continue this to-morrow.

XXV

AT times I love this life—at others I hate it; at present I am hating it, as I am on the verge of becoming a casualty—but that's another story. Let me deal with events in their chronological order.

Having dismounted, we told our horses, or rather the groom, to wait for us at the A side of B cross-roads, but to keep clear, as the road had been shelled pretty continuously for the previous twenty-four hours. The village was a pitiful sight, on the eastern side hardly a house was left standing, and those few that seemed complete were minus ceilings or upstairs, others were totally down, some with gaping wounds and others with no front at all. We pushed on through the village to where our com-

munication trench should have been, but failed to find it. While resting and looking at maps a battery opened fire immediately behind us, and lest peradventure the Hun attempted counter battery work, we moved on. Presently we spotted signs of life on one of the wobbly white lines that mark the trenches, and we made for it. On reaching it we found it to be Brigade H.Q., and they were annoyed with us for being "on top" for fear old man Fritz should send a whiz-bang, as we were under possible observation, and so down into the trench. Here the ground is all lime, and the bottom of the trench varied from the consistency of the average lime-pit to that of soup, generally ankle deep and often nearly up to one's knees. These trenches were some of those captured from the Germans in 1915, and in order to measure the time taken to get from point to point we had to walk along each one—most tiring work; from time to time we got lost in disused trenches filled with weeds and all the refuse of war, bully beef and other tins, ammunition and

bombs, and every now and then a dud. Here the whole scene was most picturesque. Behind, the skeletons of villages and wrecked mines stood out black against the sun, now rapidly nearing the sky-line. To the right, German shells bursting on the ridge puffing up white clouds against the blue of the sky, and to the left the open country that lies behind the German lines. Around us a wilderness of desolation covered by weed-choked shell-holes of former battles —for two years ago this ground changed hands many times. At our feet, the dark green of the weeds and the crimson of the poppies standing in vivid contrast to the pure white of the chalk. As we advanced more signs of life were seen, men working at the trenches, entrances to deep dug-outs, and all the hundred and one things of life in trenches behind the line proper. At one stage we got up to read a notice we could see in a neighbouring trench, but finding the curt order "keep low," concluded that we had better get back into the trench, though personally I believe that we

were still out of range of rifles, and that the notice was a souvenir of olden times. Our reconnaissances finished, we struck back to B across country, and arrived there dead tired after many miles in sticky trenches, to find no sign of the horses in the appointed spot. We searched B and a village C, back to B, and to D, and some two hours after found them at A, where we tea-ed in the private room of a Y.M.C.A. hut leader.

After parade yesterday I got leave to go to a neighbouring town, where I made many purchases at the Ordnance. A typical French (meatless day) dinner in a French pub, preceded by a drink at the Officers' Club, and so home to billets. To-day we had a route march, and my gee was just in front of the band. Now Bobbie (the aforesaid gee) hates bands, and I had the devil of a time—bucks on and off for three-quarters of an hour, two bolts pulled up in twenty yards each time, and finally fell over backwards, horse and all. While in the air I managed to get free, and got the horse down on to its side, but fell on my injured

shoulder. How far I've injured it further as yet I can't say, or how it will affect me. Summer is over, mists in the morning and evening, falling leaves, and British Warms are the sure signs. I fear me another winter lies ahead.

XXVI

NIGHT, outside a harvest moon shines on one of the beautiful evenings that herald the coming of autumn. There is a chill in the air, and the mists are rising from the lowlands. As I write I sit alone in my mess awaiting orders, my subalterns have taken advantage of what, for them, is a slack evening, and have gone early to bed, for this may well be their last undisturbed night for many days. But for a Company Commander no night can be looked forward to with the knowledge of an unbroken sleep, for, peaceful as the night seems, we are at war, and he may never forget it. A few hours off perchance, either riding or in a neighbouring town, is his sole relaxation ; how, then, can he get away from war ? The

mess is smaller, though infinitely cleaner, than the previous one. An oval table with an oil lamp (to-night the electric light has failed), the same red-tiled floor, a dresser and a chest of drawers. Maps cover the table on which are marked the trenches that are, all too soon, to be our home, and lines of barrage from field- and machine-gun, and the hundred and one complex details of the modern battlefield. Two lace-curtained windows look out on to the village street, where over the way is the green-covered village pond. Behind the mess stretch the wooded grounds of the château across which I shall soon wend my way to bed. In these grounds we had service this morning, and after, some impulse moved me to attend Communion—why I know not; but as the atheist on the scaffold was moved to pray, “Oh God, if there be a God, save my soul if I have a soul,” so at times those very ones who can find no real belief in dogma, creed or ritual, outside that of nature, are moved to join the worshippers who can and do. The only

officer present, the men looked to me for an example of ritual regarding standing, kneeling and responding, and so probing into the depths of memory I drew to the surface such as I could. As a matter of fact I believe I only made one mistake—and I am glad I went.

I ought to have gone up the line to-day, but owing to my shoulder not being fit, I was left behind in charge of the Battalion—not an arduous job. The future is lost in obscurity, and though I know when and where we move, naturally I may give no hint. My thoughts are with you all to-night.

XXVII

A PERFECT summer day, a blue sky, cloudless, save for occasional little puffs of smoke from bursting shrapnel, for enemy aircraft have been active, and we were bombed last night. Were I asked to describe this place, to which we came last evening, I would say—"Wigan in her teens after one consultation with a beauty specialist." Picture, if you can, a village Wigan striving to keep little touches of beauty and decoration, against the ever-growing squalidness. Mines and slag-heaps knocked about by shell and bomb, and every now and again a road of decent houses, gardens and shady trees. But I am afraid that the squalor will win—even though this is France. At dusk to-night

we leave and move further eastward. I heard from — yesterday; he has now got a divisional job. Of all of us I think he has done the best, and I envy the record that he has established. To others, perhaps, his opportunities have not come. What lies ahead of each of us, none can say. From now I fear letters will be fewer and farther between, but I will do my best by card or letter until we meet again.

Somehow I still think that I shall see you before I see the New Year.

Here all is bustle, wagons and limbers moving to and from the Front, guns, troops and motor-bikes. A wagon of French munition girls has just passed. More interesting news in my next letter.

XXVIII

A LONG wooden box five feet by three feet "in the cold, dark underground." Here we move and sleep and have our being, under one of the famous battle-fields of Europe, a captured German dug-out, with German shells bumping on the roof from time to time. Had I but the ability I could paint you a word-picture that might bring to you the wonder of last night's events in their grandeur and their grimness, as it is I must do what little I can.

A long straying column along a road as darkness fell; turning westward one saw the splendour of a blood-red sunset where the crimson melted to gold, the gold to green, so often called blue. Against this the silhouetted outlines of slag-heaps and pits and houses, now ruined, now whole,

By the roadside little huts some three feet square built by their owners, who gathered around little blazing fires now that their day's work was done. The low drone of homing planes filled the air as one by one they swooped down to earth, or rose on some perilous mission, while bursting shrapnel added golden balls of fire to the firmament of heaven, now a deep, deep blue. To north, to east, to south, yellow-green flashes of guns stabbed the darkness, and the redder glare of bursting shells came ever and anon. Across an open heath, along a road pitted with shell-holes to the skeleton of a shell-smashed town like some ghostly sentinel to the gates of war. Here the sweet smell of a September evening was every now and then rendered hideous by the pungent odour of some dead horse or man, forgotten or overlooked as the tide of battle swayed forward. Through the dead town, where the smell of gas still clung to houses and issued up from cellars. Now trenches lay along the road, and the golden harvest moon turned to silver and

flooded the scene, casting long, strange shadows on the ground. A deepening roar, followed by the whizzing scream of shells as hidden batteries poured death into the German lines. A whistle, a roar, a thud, a sudden check, and on as a couple of shells spattered the road ahead. "Halt, off-load the limbers"—on to a crater where our guides awaited us. Here the chalk moulds and craters of the shattered German lines along which we walked looked like miniature snow-clad mountains in the moonlight. Destruction everywhere, but a destruction that was grand while it was dreadful. And so to dug-outs, and the night-time "hate" and gas—a doze, and the wonderful dawn of a perfect daybreak. Exploration of trenches, broken by pauses to look at aerial combats far up in the blue, where planes looked like bits of silver dust whirled about by the breeze. Interest covered and crushed every other emotion, and though many of the things that lie about seem loathsome in cold-blooded language, I found nothing of loathing there. Now a human

skull with matted ginger hair, but with the top bashed in, now a hand or arm sticking up from some badly-buried body or shell-smashed grave, and everywhere the appalling waste of war—spades, shovels, German clothes, armour, ammunition scattered in a chaos beyond words.

Crash ! bang ! boom ! and like rabbits to earth once more ; we have been spotted, and whiz-bangs fall—a dozen wasted German shells.

Packed like sardines we lie and try to snatch some moments' sleep ; shave in our breakfast tea, and clean our teeth in our lunch-time coffee, and wash not at all. With revolvers by our sides, and respirators on our chests, we live in the perpetual night of underground, coming to the surface to work or see a little of God's sunshine, or explore as shells permit and the spirit moves us. Time as a measure has ceased to be and our watches serve just as checks on our movements. I love the life, and oh, how I hate it too !

My love to you.

XXIX

AS I said before, watches are only useful in notifying change of dates and rendering of reports. For instance, I went to bed about 4 a.m., lunched at 3.30 p.m., and now it is some time in the middle of the night, the most active time of the day, or rather of the twenty-four hours. Last night, and again to-night, I watched the fascinating sight of a bombardment by night. By day, when artillery duels or shelling of back areas is taking place, one just hears the shells passing to and fro, a whirr and possibly a distant puff of smoke and debris where an earthwork or possibly a house has gone up. By night one sees the flashes of the guns, and the line of bursting shells. Do you remember dis-

cussing the value of railway junctions and the importance of capturing them? Once our artillery has found them there is nothing left worth talking about. I walked along a bit of one yesterday, but I never knew it until I found half a railway signal sticking out of the chalk. At times, of course, one sees embankments with smashed tracks, but as often as not they have just ceased to be. To-day I've been exploring, for, as I said, the earth is full of interest. This is the most trying part of the day for a Company Commander; one's men and subalterns are off on jobs, and here one sits alone in one's dug-out, waiting and wondering what is happening to one's officers and men. One knows about where each of them is, and one hears a shell (it's extraordinary how soon one gets to locate them even when sitting underground), and although one is responsible for them, one is yet unable at times to share their dangers. Of all jobs this of consolidation of captured ground is about the rottenest. Of course, Fritz knows every dug-out to a yard,

Although he may not know which one is occupied, he soon finds out, and suddenly, when he has nothing else to think about, he lets us know. Yesterday, my men were worried by machine-guns and snipers, and so to-day I disguised myself as a piece of chalk and tried to find them—a more than usually interesting form of hide-and-seek. If one finds them, a few words to the artillery, a map reference and one has peace for a time. One subaltern has returned, and is now sleeping on a bunk we made this afternoon out of six cases of ammunition and a couple of stretchers. Let me describe our dug-out : a window frame some three feet square in the chalk in the side of the trench, a steep dark flight of steps, and one reaches the outer tunnel ; at the end of which a distant candle reveals my Sergeant-Major, clerk, and Gas N.C.O. From this open little rooms about five feet square where Officers' Orderlies sleep ; from this a lower tunnel of the same dimensions, reached by a similar window and shorter

flight of steps, and one comes to our living-room; a six by two shelf serves as a table, at which, if one is sitting at it, no other can pass. At the end, the telephone and signallers; an emergency exit, in case the first is blown in, leads to another part of the trench. From our living-room a lower tunnel runs forward into a little sandbagged pit at the top of a flight of stairs; this passage serves as our store, kitchen, larder and everything else we want. Our furniture is crude in the extreme; from nails in the walls hang packs, coats, spare pieces of equipment, post-cards, time-tables, orders, fly-papers and tin hats. On the shelf or table is an oil lamp, some bottles, glasses, tinned milk, butter and jam, yesterday's newspapers and all one's possessions that go for a trip into the line. Scattered about the floor are closed stretchers, which, balanced from stairs to table or from petrol tins to pack, form our beds. With Burberry for pillow, or an air-pillow sometimes, and fleece lining for

covering, we snatch an hour or two's sleep by night or day, until our turn for duty comes. Often as I sit reading in the lonely night vigils I look up suddenly and wonder if this can be real, or whether I am not asleep and dreaming some strangely impossible dream. Reality is seldom with me these days, and all is lost in vagueness in this life, where hour after hour drags by; where a day may seem a year from dullness, or a lifetime's excitement may be crammed into a matter of seconds. We are not ashamed of being afraid, as we often are—not afraid of any definite thing, but just afraid of being afraid; when the time for action comes there is little time for fear. In warfare only cowards are the really brave men, for they have to force themselves to do things that brave men do instinctively. To my mind the man who deserves decoration is the man who forces himself to be what others are normally, and to do the normal man's job, which so many other men are doing and have done

for so long. Oh, how I envy the veterans, who, young in years perhaps, are by experience old in the routine of life, and who without qualm just carry on instinctively month after month.

XXX

THE middle of the night. I've just returned from a three-hour reconnaissance of the front line, or rather to the limit of the front wave, for no line exists. The dug-out that has been allotted to me for next week is an old divisional H.Q. of the German Army, fitted as though it were impregnable, arm-chairs, bureaus, cabinets, framed pictures and electric lights, an upstairs with double and single bedrooms, more like a week-end cottage than a dug-out, but further details later. The main disadvantage is the atmosphere, for the place is littered with German dead. We explored all round, including a trench running up to the present Hun line, and wandered back. One R.E. officer got the

wind up badly when he saw us smoking, for he said that the cigarettes would draw machine-gun fire, and so back to tea. To-day has been moderately quiet, a few 5·9s and some spent machine-gun bullets fell on and about our trench, but apart from this nothing much to write about. Down below things were more lively, and bullets were falling about the parapets and clinking overhead, but one soon gets used to them. Dug-outs are very nice comfy places, so comfy that one doesn't want to get out of them; sometimes it requires considerable mental effort, but once out it's not so bad.

Good-night, or rather good-morning.

XXXI

IT'S not always easy in this life to look on the bright side; still one must do one's best to keep not only oneself cheerful, but to be an example to all those under one. To know that they can do things so much better than you can, and yet to pretend always that you can do everything better than they, for to let those who look to you for leadership imagine that you are wavering is to court disaster for yourself and those around you. Some jobs are harder than others, and to be chosen for one of these is, I suppose, in a way a compliment. Were I to let myself go I might be tempted to write of the prospect in the months that lie ahead, but I am not going to. What men have lived through, men

can live through again. Thank Heaven, two of my men who were missing from a working party have turned up. So far I have not had a casualty—and you don't want to think of to-morrow in this life.

Life here, in spite of all, has its humour, and to see others laugh and join in their laughter, although shells are bursting within a hundred yards and often within twenty, and bullets are whizzing round one's ears or splashing at one's feet, seems strangely natural. I would like to go to sleep, and for a while at least forget, but two of my platoons are out, and I am not going till they get back. Things are a little quieter now, though not much. Last night I was through it and not minding, to-night, though I am in the comparative safety of a dug-out, I am not nearly so happy; but I suppose that that is life. From to-morrow for five days or so I shall be in command of my position, shut off as it were from the outside world. Still, I expect the time will pass quickly. It's a great responsibility, and it's that that tells. It isn't as

though I'd worked up to the position and had experience behind me, I plunge straight into it, walking before I can crawl. Still, I hope and expect to come through all right. Imagination on these occasions is rather a handicap. Don't think that I am depressed, I'm not, but these letters are more or less pictures of the moods I am in, and my time for writing is during the lonely vigils of the night, when depression holds its strongest grip on the tired mind and body; this and the never-changing scene of desolation around one, the waste, wreckage and carnage of war, must tinge one's mind towards gloom. One's pictures are set in sombre colours, and one's pen reflects mainly their darker hues. The cheerful moments here are too precious to lose. Cheer-oh !

My love to you all.

XXXII

A STRANGE life, this life of "Strong Posts," cut off from the world during the light : unable to move for bullets from enfilading machine-guns and snipers, one sleeps in one's dug-out. By night, however, a different and more dreadful story. Aerial darts and whiz-bangs concentrate on the only means of approach to the dug-out, and so it's a case of all on top all night. Sometimes the night passes quietly, sometimes not. Water is scarce and the only chance we get of washing is in the potato water.

The dug-out is luxurious, hung with green canvas with white wood strips down, and framed pictures. Furnished with a large smoking-cabinet, a bureau, two arm-

chairs and several of the wooden variety, with a small table in the centre. The Germans used electric light, but as the power plant is in their possession, we descend to oil. From this at a slightly lower level opens a bedroom complete with washhand-stand, chest of drawers and a double bed. Behind are the servants' quarters, etc. The whole place is full of souvenirs of German occupation, for it's less than a month since they were driven out.

XXXIII

FRITZ gave us the devil of a time last night; things were fairly quiet till 11 p.m., then he gave us twenty minutes in his best style, whiz-bangs and aerial darts fell thickly around us. At 11.20 p.m. gas shells came for five minutes, and at 11.30 p.m. for ten minutes. Living as we do at the bottom of a quarry, the place was full of poison, a dark night, men coughing and groping in their respirators, some got the wind up properly. Men came clamouring for the S.O.S. call to be given, and so I resolved to go and find out what was happening. I went out through the barrage, a man clutched at me and loosened my mask. Three shells burst simultaneously round me, fragments pattering on my

hat and round my feet. Up to the top to find one post "na poo," then along to the next. I remember getting up to run across, and then next thing that I remember is finding myself at the bottom of the quarry, bruised, shaken and slightly gassed. I conclude that I was blown up. A poor sort of night, but we pulled through it somehow. This afternoon I delated the —— for wandering about my lines without permission, and detained him for an hour while he established his identity. I discovered a Hun disguised as a bush this morning. Life is still interesting, but the constant strain is beginning to tell, and the responsibility is awfully trying.

XXXIV

I, TOO, am sad at the news of ——'s death, we had known each other so long, and had so many memories, but to us the awfulness of the missing gaps will not come until Peace; until little by little we try to take up the old threads of life, only to find so many broken and twisted. Oh ! how I hate the war, with its monument of sorrow, and its endless toll of suffering. Last night, too, I saw from the paper that young —— had been killed. Why do all the best go—the only sons? Surely the scale of justice seems at fault, and yet “greatly have ye received, greatly give.” Very, very few will come through

untouched; for a hundred days one lives with death around one in a hundred forms, and on the hundred and first one's turn comes. When, and where, these are the questions, and yet, with a glorious faith, one goes straight on. I'm trying very hard to learn the spirit that moves so many others, and which I suppose only time can bring. I'm still in swaddling clothes as it were, and suffer every now and then from growing pains.

Last night was quiet, almost too quiet for my liking, and dawn was a dawn of mysteries which as yet remain unsolved. What to-night will bring none can say: our turn for an easier time is getting near, and our monthly ten days' rest is not so very far away. Unfortunately, winter with its cold and mud is upon us, and when we see a tree again I expect that many leaves will be falling. The days—or rather the little ones sees of them, for to leave one's dug-out during the light is to ask for trouble—are still warm and sunny, but dawn

is shiveringly cold, and the ever-lengthening nights are getting more and more trying. My injury troubles me, and I shall take the first opportunity of getting X-rayed.

My love to you all.

XXXV

FIFTEEN hours' rest, and oh, the infinite relief, the joy of seeing civilisation again!—but let me deal with things in order. In my last letter I wondered if the night would be quiet: it was, but it was a night of intense suspense; five hundred against ninety are long odds to fight, and never have I prayed for the dawn as I did that night.

Last night was a night of inky blackness and driving rain, making the chalk trenches as treacherous as possible; the best-nailed boots became clogged, and one slipped and skidded about the place. A road at last, although just in front of the guns, as they poured forth their shower of death. Hot

fumes burst across our faces, and the acrid smell of bursting charge, mingled with that of the hot paint of the guns. The flashes lit up the skeleton scene of desolated houses and then left the night blacker than before. At last, dog tired, we reached our resting-place—a bed, clean clothes, and a wash—a few snatched hours of sleep, and then off to the trenches once more. A new sector this. In single file we crossed a flat table-land and so to our dug-out, some twenty feet below ground. Hewn out of the chalk, “papered” with corrugated iron, it leaves much to be desired, but life for the next five days will be comparatively peaceful, and as safe as war can be.

I suppose that absence makes the longing greater and the realisation more intense. To me a squalid village, a dusty street, a dirty child, seemed things of beauty and of worth, and the sun setting behind the slag-heaps and smoke-hung air, a thing to call forth a psalm of praise. To see the country around one, to feel its freedom, and the air on one’s face, to throw aside one’s

equipment and, greatest joy of all, to live on the level revelling in the daylight—only those exiles from earth's beauty, released for a time, can know what these things mean. Prisoners freed from prison !

XXXVI

A PERFECT day as far as the weather has been concerned, and, for us, little of war. Shells burst behind us, and every now and then a house across the plain vanished in a cloud of smoke, earth and debris. We made up our hard spell of last week by snatching a few extra hours' sleep. For four days, before coming out, I only got about five hours' sleep in all, apart from dozing in a chair. The trenches here are quite picturesque: winding about amid half-ruined traverses one comes to little tunnels, and through these one catches glimpses of the crimson of poppies, or the blue of cornflowers, against the dark green of the grass. Here the chalk from long

disuse has become covered with mould and earth, and gives a soft brown background to all. I lunched in the sunshine, and then crept out over the back of the trench, and lay amid the weeds, and dreamed of England, and all that it means to me, and to all of us exiles from the earth's Peace. As I lay I watched a flight of Hun 'planes dodging Archie shells, and somehow was glad to see them get away, until I thought of all that their presence there meant. A wonderful evening, followed by a glorious sunset : one of those where the whole earth seems bathed in purple haze, and the heavens filled with crimson specks of cloud. A year ago I was with you ; a year hence I hope to be so again, when war shall be banished from the lives of those who live to-day. The line, especially the reserve line, does not afford that fund of interest and material for letters that one finds behind. And though each day brings its own new experiences, they are not so vivid and are often half forgotten before the chance to write of them arrives. In this strange life there

seems no real distinction between night and day, each brings its hours of toil, or its snatched times of rest. No hours are regular, and meals come down when we can take them.

XXXVII

A NOTHER peaceful, or comparatively peaceful, day. Material for letters—that is to say, items of interest—are few and far between when life is spent in reserve trenches. I slept intermittently throughout the morning, having been up all night, lunched, was massaged, and spent the afternoon shooting Hun 'planes with Lewis guns, a more exciting sport than grouse shooting, which it resembles, as sometimes they shoot back ! At first most of the birds flew high or failed to cross our " butt," but towards evening, one came flying low straight for our trench. I emptied six drums (forty-seven rounds per drum) into it from two guns, and it turned round and went home. I packed the Company off in small working parties

and then dined, smoked, glanced at a forty-eight-hour-old London paper, and am now writing in my dug-out. This is some twenty feet below ground, six feet wide and six high, and some eighteen feet long; at one end are four bunks in two layers, made of wire-netting, which serve us for beds, and into which we crawl when duty permits. Being rusty, they creak with every movement, and sleep, save to tired bodies and still more tired minds, is impossible. In the centre, along one side, is a bench, two feet by four, which serves us for a table, while shelves round the walls and nails take our worldly wealth, valises being with the transport some miles behind the line waiting for our next rest. Outside it is a beautiful starlight night, with just a touch of frost in the air; guns are pumping away, and every now and then comes the rending sound of a Minnie, the worst implement of destruction that we normally have to face. Each gun, or dart, or mortar has its own distinctive sound, screech, or hum, and one soon gets to know and recognise

them, and call them by their names. Books of a light nature, short stories and magazines are always acceptable to while away the moments that are our own to spend. I wrote to —'s Adjutant for the place of his grave, and for any details I could get. I will make a careful note of it should I get an answer. Have you ever thought of the heartbreaking pilgrimages that will be made to France, after the war is over, by those who can afford to come? Mothers and fathers, wives and sweethearts, searching for their loved ones' graves. Each man who dies is, when possible, carried back and buried behind the lines, and his grave is carefully recorded. Of course where many fall together in an attack they are buried in shell-holes, but even then the place is noted. At dusk and dawn and through the long vigils of the night, one sees burial parties at work. The other day a Canadian Chaplain went forward into No Man's Land by day and read the burial service over a Canadian. The Officer-in-charge offered to go with him, but the

Chaplain turned and said, "No, no, my boy, I am old and you are young, and have your duty to perform." He and two others went to what seemed like certain death, and returned, their duty done.

The Hun, too, is often brave. I heard from a man who saw it—a Gunner Major—of a case of quiet nerve that served Germany in good stead. Hill No. —— had fallen, and the Huns launched a counter attack in seven waves led by an officer on a horse, until the horse fell dead. The German then lighted a cigarette, and cheered the men on to hoped-for victory, but in reality to defeat. Here, too, a party of twenty-eight men were cut off and fought till every man was killed. Yet Hill —— remains ours. Don't think that fear is not with us—it is, but slowly one learns to conquer it, and that makes the achievement the greater.

XXXVIII

I'M awfully tired, but this may well be my last undisturbed night this week, and I know how much letters must mean to you waiting and waiting for news in England, with only the local human vegetable garden to divert your thoughts. All afternoon I've been wandering about the front line, exploring, and learning to find my way about that desolate waste of devastation representing recently captured ground. One waded knee high amid tangled under-growth dotted with three-foot stakes, and learned from the map that this was a wood. One looked for a railway, where only a buried bar of twisted metal could be found. One road we could not find at all, so battered was the countryside; and so after five and a half hours' wandering, we returned

to a dinner of soup, steak, stewed fruit and cocoa. To-day I noticed for the first time the wonderful variety of insect life in the trenches; flies and beetles of gorgeous and varied colour showing against the vivid white of the fresh-cut chalk. Past a famous mining village which for two years has been swept by shell-fire, now British, now German, until nothing save the village Crucifix remains unbattered; iron, brick and concrete, twisted by the awful destructive power of high explosives. Graves dating back to October 1915, and up to the present time, lie scattered here and there, but each with the name of the fallen one well marked on it, waiting to be claimed when Peace shall come. As I walked the old lines flashed into my head—

“ And though you be done to the death, what then.
If you battled the best you could?
If you played your part in the world of men,
Why, the critics will call it good!
Death comes with a crawl, or comes with a pounce,
And whether he’s slow or spry,
It isn’t the fact that you’re dead that counts,
But only, how did you die? ”

Strange ! but nowhere did I see a German grave other than those with the inscription in English, "A German Soldier killed in action." Dead Germans have I seen, but never a German grave.

There seems to be no bird life here, beyond a rare covey of partridges well behind the line, or a solitary lark searching for summer. One misses—oh, so much!—the cheeky chirp of the sparrow or the note of the thrush. We found a stray terrier about yesterday and have adopted it, but I don't think it will go into the front line : there's enough human suffering, without adding innocent canine victims that cannot understand. Here let me say a word for the horses and mules, exposed to dangers and terror (for mules actually come into the trenches to within 200 yards of the line), patiently doing their work, often terrified, often mutilated and never understanding why they have been taken from their peaceful life to the struggle and hardship of war. Much has been written, much is being done, but how few realise it from their point of

view. The men are wonderful, their cheerfulness, their ability to work is nothing short of marvellous; but for the others, the animals, their patient slavery is more wonderful still.

Coming over the ridge to-night I saw the distant hills against the after-glow of sunset; the moment was quiet, as one often finds it so; for those few seconds no guns were firing, no shells bursting, and not even the distant "poop" of a rifle was to be heard. It seemed so English, just as though we were on one of our September holidays in the car, looking towards the north hill country that I love so much. Then suddenly the guns started, and we were at war again. There is one of those strange feelings of expectation in the air to-night, as though there were great things pending, and yet all is normal as far as we know.¹ Who knows, perhaps the end is not as far as we believe. A few more days of trial and we shall have earned our next rest.

¹ A few hours later the Germans suffered a severe defeat.

I go to my so-called bed, to try and snatch
a few short hours' sleep, lulled by the music
of the guns that have started their nightly
hate.

My love to you. Keep smiling.

XXXIX

THE shortest of notes, written once more from a front line dug-out. A few more days, hours almost, and we get our release, and, for a time at any rate, a taste of civilisation, even if of a rural variety. A warmer corner this, but not so trying to one's nerves, for here one is not alone, and at any rate can find the moral support of companionship. War loses half its terrors when shared by two or more of equal rank, for then a little of the awful responsibility is shared. Dawn brought its fall of dew, not moisture unfortunately but medium Minnies, which for a few moments rent and shook the earth. I had just gone into the dug-out when the first

one fell. So often I have just done something, when something has happened ! Let us hope the luck will hold. My injury is paining me, this spasmodic and often literally jerky life is not good for it.

XL

PICTURE if you can a flight of twenty-four steps leading into the darkness of the underground. At the foot of this a room, if room it can be called, some thirteen feet by ten by seven high, the walls of tree trunks and railway sleepers, the roof of corrugated iron resting on railway lines; from this hang stalactites of rust, and large and loathsome insects creep about, above lives a colony of rats: such is our living-room, damp with a dampness that reaches one's bones and makes all things clammy to the touch. A couple of tables, a chair and some boxes, such is our dining-room suite. From this a long, narrow, low passage leads to the kitchen, signallers' and 'phone-room, officers' bunks and office.

By day and night one stumbles among sleeping soldiers off duty, tired enough to find sleep on the boarded floor. My bed—a couple of boards and some sand-bags—is four feet from the ground, too narrow for safety, and yet I sleep. Men who previously grumbled at an eight-hour day, now do eighteen hours for seven days a week—such is war, and such is the spirit in which they take it.

Outside—or rather up above—a cold drizzle adds to the general discomfort, “pineapples” drop promiscuously about, but one can hear them coming, save when barrages are about, and the roar of gun and bursting shell drowns all else. One nearly got me this morning, I just ducked in time as it burst on the parapet behind where I was standing—a splinter caught my tin hat, but bounded off. In spite of all, this has been a cheery day. One learns to laugh at Fritz’s efforts to kill one, and at the appalling waste of money he spends in misplaced shells; one laughs still more when they fall in his own lines from his own guns,

and frantic cries of distress and protest, in the form of coloured rockets, fill the air. LIFE, even with all its letters capitals, has its humours. Dire rumours of the postponement of our longed-for rest—but what is rumour, after all?

Half of another weary night has passed. I took a morning in bed (five hours, only disturbed twice) and so raised my sleep average to nearly four hours a day.

How unreal it seems to be writing with a loaded revolver by one's paper, and a respirator on one's chest. I bet the Huns are sorry that they ever invented gas. You make too much of what I did on Monday, it was nothing wonderful, and had I had time to think, I should probably have funkied it. Instinct and training and the excitement of the moment—that is all, just my duty. I did see a brave act that morning, and one that required real pluck, not excitement. I must see a specialist about the injury as soon as I can get an appointment. Still smiling.

XLI

MUCH has happened since last I wrote, commencing that very night. The Bosche treated us to a "Minnie" display, quite the worst thing that I have yet been up against. Starting on our right, it was a wonderful thing to watch. One saw these engines of destruction creeping through the air like red-hot airships, leaving their trail of sparks and smoke; one saw the light, heard the dull rending sound that is their characteristic noise, and felt the blast of their explosion, and the shaking earth. Streams of rockets calling for help—a fine and wonderful sight—but when one's own turn came, then, indeed, it was a different story. Trenches fell in, men were buried, and all was just one

anxious hour, watching, dodging, and yet fascinated as a bird is fascinated by a snake. All over save for the normal nightly straff, and the anxious search for those who failed to answer the call. Frantic digging, and the sad finding of the yet breathing and the dead. The ghost-like dawn brought the grim task of clothing the few in their last earthly garment—sand-bags and ground-sheets tied up with string. An unromantic shroud, and yet such is war. Twenty-four more hours of anxiety—relief and the great joy of one more day snatched from war. A day spent by me in a visit to hospital, and back—twelve miles—too far for tired men to walk, and so I went to an Advanced Dressing Station for a car. I was just starting when the whirr of Hun shells came in the air, and the rending crump of a heavy burst. Back to our cellar again for a two-hour wait in that shell-swept village—then on by car. The Battalion has moved on to-night, leaving me to await the surgeon's verdict. I am in no mood for letters, and so good-night.

XLII

A DAY of half-forgotten luxury on the very fringe of war. By night a few shells whine through the air, bursting about the town; by day, save for the endless traffic and sedate bustle of war, all is peaceful. A day of perfect weather in summer's second childhood, which precedes its lingering twilight, before the winter night-time comes to earth. A comfortable bedroom, with electric light; a night hardly disturbed save perchance by a quickening heartbeat as a shell falls nearer than the last; a vague wonder as to the promise of dawn; then all-powerful sleep asserts its rights and once more proves victor over the danger of death by a stray shell. A hot bath, my second in France, and a

thorough wash; clean clothes, and the clean smell of carbolic, and one feels again the joy of peace. I lay in bed till noon, not because of tiredness, but for the sheer joy of being able to do so. Clean table-cloth, music—oh! I can't tell what joys these are. How they who return will appreciate the things they took for granted before the war brought its great cleansing blast on the minds of the human race. From it we shall arise a greater, nobler nation, for in truth we shall have been “welded by the hand of love, tempered by life's tears.”

Looking back on the experiences of these last months, confused thoughts fill my mind: let me try to tabulate them for you. To me they seem like a man who has read of life in some out-of-the-world place, seeing his first play, which deals with life as it is. The expectancy; the wonder of the scenery; the characters on the stage; his thoughts at the fall of the curtain after one of the acts; a confused jumble of analysis of the past and attempted synthesis of the future.

So it is with me to-day, writing as I do in the second interval, patiently waiting for the curtain to rise again. In this theatre no programmes are sold, and none may say when the play shall end, and the curtain fall on the last act. At the very outset I am handicapped for want of language in which to write, "Thoughts hardly to be packed into a narrow act, Fancies that break through language and escape." Oh, for the gift of letters !

At first the waiting for orders; the wonder of how to adapt one's nature to the conditions that lay ahead. The fear of being afraid. Many times in that last week in London, which now seems so far away, I did aimless, meaningless things that I had done before; wondering if I should ever do them again. Visiting old scenes of happy days, trying, as it were, to conjure up old associations, for fear the chance might not come again. Strange, perhaps, but many of the things I do are strange, and only those who know me best would understand. My good-bye to you—and

the curtain rose on the first act of the drama that I have been privileged to watch, with every now and then a "walking on" part. The first act was one of absorbing interest, learning the characters of the play, and my mind was filled with wonder at the plot as day by day it unfolded before me. I have tried to write of all the wonders of the Base; its organisation and the mastery of an Empire to serve its ideal in its hour of need. The second curtain rose on the Trenches, and it is my impressions of this life, rather than of its details, that I would now write. The first and greatest is the way the average man has surmounted the impossible, has brought, as it were, a power to strike that word from his vocabulary. Living in conditions which in previous years would have caused his death, he has maintained his vitality of mind and body. Healthy amid the pestilence of decaying death, of chill from nights spent sometimes waist deep in water; or chattering with cold as a misty morning finds him saturated with its clammy cold. Facing death from

bullet, shell and gas, and all the ingenuity that devilish manhood can devise, yet remaining the same cheery, lively animal, wondering when it all will cease. A new spirit of unselfishness has entered the race, or perchance the old selfishness bred by years of peace has died, leaving a cleaner, nobler feeling in its place. Men who before cheated their neighbours, grasping to themselves all that came their way, have learned instinctively to share their little all. The message from Mars, "Halves, partner," has become the general spirit; and yet some say that there is no finer side to war! As for the officers, as a rule, no words for them can be too fine. For they have learned at once to be the leaders and the servants of their men, tiring themselves out for others' comforts. And the men know it: from them can come no class hatred in future years. If danger lies in that direction it must surely come from those who have stayed at home.

For myself, I am slowly learning my lesson; learning that death, which seems

so near one, seldom shakes one by the hand. Learning to look over the "top" to encourage those whose duty makes them do so. Learning to walk out with a wiring-party to "No Man's Land," or to set a patrol along its way. Learning to share the risks that others run so as to win the confidence of my men.

Now let me say a word of the demoralising effects of dug-outs. Often it takes a conscious effort to leave its safety, or to stay away from it, for the dangers of level ground, and this is what all officers must learn; for men can have no confidence in one who, ordering them out, stays underground himself. I am learning, but, oh! so slowly, for mine is not a nature that is really shaped for war. A vivid imagination is here a handicap, and it is those who have little or none who make the best soldiers. At last the "finished and finite clod" has come into his own. Stolid, in a danger he hardly realises, he remains at his post, while the other, perchance shaking in every limb, has double the battle to

fight. My pencil wanders on and I hardly seem to know what I write. Confused thoughts and half-formed impressions crowd through my brain, and from the chaos some reach the paper. What kind of reading do they make? I wonder.

XLIII

I'VE not been able to write before, hence the gap in my letters. Since writing I have been given a chance of learning, first hand, of the wonders of the Medical Services out here. I was lucky to go through while able to see and note and wonder at its organisation, without my faculties marred by excessive pain, or the handicap of shattered limb; just a dull ache with occasional shooting pains, which may lead me anywhere or may be right again soon. Anyway a rest that already is freshening tired mind and aching body; and peace. How thankful I am, none but those who have been through it can realise.

After waiting at the Transport Lines,

I at last received orders to report at the Advanced Dressing Station, and wait for a car, as I was not bad enough to be "an urgent case." I took my turn and eventually left about 4 p.m. on Thursday afternoon. A ride along a now familiar road, to a now familiar town, viewed this time through the square opening of the back of a Motor Ambulance, and so to a Field Ambulance. An hour's rest, tea and toast, and on again by car to a Casualty Clearing Station situated in a château amid a wooded park. A quiet, peaceful evening, and a moonlight walk about the grounds, and so to bed. I am not going to describe in detail what a hospital ward is like, for you are more qualified to do that than I. Just a night picture, and the acknowledgement that no praise, however great, can be too great for the kindness, the care, the consideration that is shown by doctors, nurses and orderlies for all committed to their charge. I can say no more than that I am proud to have a sister who is sharing in this work. And just the one promised

picture, typical enough, perhaps, but it is one of those that is vividly stamped on my memory.

A long wooden hut filled with its row of beds on either side—a silence so great that one can all but hear it—marred at times by the thud of a falling chestnut on the wooden roof, or soothed by the gentle whisper of trees without. A subdued light which to tired eyes is perhaps more restful than darkness. A sudden sound without and the muffled tread of stretcher-bearers' feet, as they carry in the unconscious form of a nineteen-year-old boy. A boy, who from a night-bombing raid has crashed to earth with dislocated hip, bashed-in head, and face cut to pieces in his fall. A light at the far end of the ward as surgeons, nurses and comrades gather round or wait near for news. For in each fresh case one loses for a time a little of one's own pain. A half-smothered groan that no will on earth can keep behind the clenched teeth, as the surgeon's fingers, be they never so gentle, feel about the wound. A

whispered consultation—good news, and the stretcher-bearers withdraw—but not before another touching little scene was enacted. In the next bed to mine lay another R.F.C. Officer, almost a baby he looked, and yet he had a record that many a hardened soldier might be proud of. Anxious for news he lay awake, and was recognised by one of the privates, just an ordinary worker in some ordinary workshop whom one would think knew no sentiment, and yet when he saw that boy he was down on his knees by his side with a look of devotion in his eyes, such as one sees in a dog's eyes when looking up to his loved master. How little, after all, one knows of the lives around one.

Next day—yesterday, in fact—a thirteen-hour journey in a Red Cross train brought me to a well-remembered Base. A drive in a car (driven by one of those girls who are doing such good work out here) and I am at rest in a delightful place in the heart of that forest I wrote about some months ago. By a strange coincidence it is run

by the same people who own the last hospital I was in.

What the future holds I cannot say, but will let you know as soon as possible.

Truly one must have, stamped on one's mind for ever, the knowledge of the price that Freedom and Liberty demand.

The last months seem as unreal as a dream, and yet from the chaos of emotion and experience with which their memory is crowded, vivid pictures stand out. To me the most vivid is that of the "Minnies" creeping through the darkness which fascinate one as a bird is fascinated by a snake.

XLIV

A HAPPY, idle, pleasant life, this hospital existence—though one that would tend to boredom after a while. In June weather, so perfect that it is possible to sit in the sunshine at 8 a.m. (which to you is 7 a.m., summer time being still in force) clad only in pyjamas and a dressing-gown. June, save for the thinning trees and the gold-and-brown of the forest and the carpet of fallen leaves. At 7.30 (S.T.) we get up and have a bath, at 8.30 we breakfast, and read the paper in the grounds. Dress leisurely and wait for the M.O.'s morning visit. Free till lunch we wander, doze in the sunlight, read or play games; at 12.30 we lunch, and then, unless treatment hours clash, are free till 7 p.m.,

when we dine. Golf, tennis, croquet are at our disposal; many parties of walking patients, V.A.D.s and nurses go off to the sea for an afternoon bathe, for the water is still delightfully warm—and tea—tea with all its luxuries of fresh bread and fancy cakes! Generally I wander to the sand-hills on the shore, that are so like home, and just lie in the sunlight, dozing and listening to the murmur of the waves and watch the French and English girls walking on the front. After seeing none but poorly-clad, country women, it's a treat to see a decent dress again.

The staff of the hospital are all, or nearly all, well-known people, as this is one of the "very-very" hospitals. Being a Red Cross and not a Military one, there is more freedom and less red tape than in most, and this adds considerably to the comfort and happiness of the inmates. Besides, the situation and building are ideal for the purpose. The evenings are too perfect for words; as mild as possible, one can walk or just sit watching the moon turn

from gold to silver, as it rises through the trees, which are, at this hour, all the more beautiful for having lost some of their foliage, that otherwise would cast too deep a shadow. Or sometimes, when the spirit moves us, we gather round the card- or billiard-tables for an evening's amusement, which finishes all too soon at 9.30 p.m. Sometimes a concert is arranged, and such concerts ! Sometimes we get one of the V.A.D.s, who has a most glorious voice, to sing some of our favourite songs. Oh ! it's good to have a little peace again.

My injury is getting much better, I am pleased to say—though, I fear me, many of the old games and sports have gone for ever. Never again shall I be able to tramp with a pack on my back, nor row in an eight or four, never to play football; perhaps never to ride or golf. However, time alone will show, and I am not grumbling. So much—so very much—that before I took for granted is left to me, and oh ! how I shall value it. A new scale of valuation for the little pleasures of life, and for life

itself, has come, and I feel has come to stay, and surely this must last throughout the lives of those that have seen the price mankind has had to pay.

There is a short poem by Browning, the title of which for the moment I have forgotten ; it starts—

“ Only the prism’s obstruction shows aright
The secret of the sunbeam, breaks its light
Into the jewelled bow from blankest white;
So may a glory from defect arise.”

Take it and read it, learn it, remember it, and you will learn what I mean. In the one line, “ So may a glory from defect arise,” you have the secret of the wonderful courage with which the majority of the halt, the maimed, the blind, are facing the future. A new scale of values for the trivial things of life has arisen—if only this will stay. Do you remember that poem of Harvey’s, “ If we return ? ”

“ Nay, we shall dread
If we return,
Dread lest we hold blood-guiltily
The things that men have died to free.”

For me at any rate this is so, and I feel that few can have gone through so much and not feel it, where I have done so little.

I cannot get over my admiration for the girls of England; the more I see, the more I wonder at the work they are doing. Girls who before the war were content with the daily routine of home life, or the whirl of Society's pleasure-seeking crowd, are to-day doing work that involves nothing but a life of drudgery. For what interest is it to wash and scrub and clean for twelve hours of the twenty-four? And yet that is what many of the Society and titled girls are doing here. Not even the interest of wounds and nursing, not the interest of motor-driving, where every hour is different and yet in a way the same, these services, although meritorious, are interesting in their way. But the daily washing-up, seven days a week for month after month—I look at it all, and wonder—and thank heaven for the English girl.

XLV

AND so, apparently, at any rate, my fighting days are over, and I am to become a unit in that vast machine that works night and day behind the lines. Of course, I should never really have come out, but seeing the chance I took it, and shall always be thankful that I did. For in these months I have had years of educational value, and have gained experience that will be useful to me throughout my life. To have learnt at first hand of war from which all romance has been stripped is indeed a gain, apart from the knowledge that danger brings and, greatest gift perhaps of all, the knowledge of human character.

Well, no knowledge comes without payment, and I shall pay, for years to come, by

a fractured dislocation of the shoulder and the constant ache of synovitis and rheumatism which such an injury will bring—and yet it has been worth it.

There is little of news—the perfect weather has broken and in place of warmth and sunshine, gales and cold and rain depress us, and yet in spite of all, a cheery unconquerable spirit of victory pervades each ward, and meetings of officers are jovial occurrences. For the future, unless I can get a job, which naturally I shall try to do, life will be a dull, monotonous form of existence; but at present all is in the air.

XLVI

I WAS discharged from Hospital to-day, and was very sorry to go, for these last weeks have, in a way, been the happiest of the war. Ah well, all good things must end. It makes the outlook a little harder, and a little easier to face, harder in its contrast and easier by its memories. Perhaps it's as well I left or I might have fallen in love with one of the nurses. I'm glad to have learnt what these girls of England are doing, glad to find in my heart a greater respect for woman, through their influence. Somehow each day spent out here brings its lesson, to those who are ready to learn, but oh ! how my very soul is sick of it all.

I am writing this at a club from which I wrote you once before. To-morrow one of

those comic railway journeys awaits me, commencing at the hour of 6.45 a.m. Time has found its old place, and day and night their own meanings once again. I'll let you know what is going to happen to me just as soon as I can, but hard or comparatively easy, somehow one must go through with it, if only for the sake of what lies beyond.

Leave must soon lie ahead, and I expect to see England once again.

XLVII

CONTRASTS—from a comfortable bed, to a blanket on a tent board; from a morning hot bath, to a bucket outside one's tent in the half light of a shivering dawn; from tables in a dining-room where four were waited on by V.A.D.s, to a long unclothed wooden table and an orderly with grimy nails—contrasts in very truth, and yet without contrasts the world would be but a poor place, for we live in comparatives, and pain, grief, joy, sorrow, happiness, can only be realised through an intimate knowledge of their opposites.

Is memory a blessing or a curse? “Sorrow's crown of sorrow”; or “The sweetest gift of heaven above throughout the treacherous years”?

Do you wonder at the war romances? Take one of the soldier boys who before he is out of his teens is making history, one who perhaps has not yet outgrown the sweetly romantic follies of adolescence, deprive him of all female society for a time, in an environment strange and new—an environment so primitive, so ugly, that only an indomitable spirit saves him from the terrors of the mind. Place him in a hospital where he becomes the personal charge of some charming girl, or on leave when admiring females envelop him in a semi-hysterical form of hero-worship (not that he doesn't deserve it), and what can you expect? Something *must* happen! No, for once I am not speaking of my own experience, though had I stayed—but after all that is a different story.

I finish with a picture of a moonlight raid. A moonlight night, from the Officers' Mess comes music and laughter, from the Y.M.C.A. the sounds of a Tommies' concert. A sudden bugle call rings out—lights are hastily extinguished. An ordered, seemly

confusion and silence. Ghost-like search-lights try to stab the darkness as if rivalling the moon in a futile fashion. Above the hum of the 'plane—the rending roar of falling bombs, mingling with the boom of guns. A thousand bursts of shrapnel add new stars—one by one the search-lights go out and all is silent once again.

Optimism is the keynote of the Army to-day.

XLVIII

THREE years ago to-day I joined the Regiment as an Officer, and in these years, which once I looked upon as wasted, but now I know that they were not, how much has happened ! To me they seem as one long moving picture show, where the scene is ever changing, and the explanations flashed on the screen are in a foreign language, not wholly understood. Memory in its mercy recalls vividly only the most moving and the pleasant scenes, horrors and hardships lie latent in the caves of the mind, to be called to the surface if needed, but seldom coming up in the whirlpool within. Looking back at random, certain scenes stand out. My first good-bye—which might have been the last—joining the

Battalion—our first Christmas night—my first leave—the Revue we produced—mad, happy evenings at Colchester—moonlight runs—evenings in town—Zepps—France— evenings at Dovercourt—going up the line —moonlight in the chalky trenches—the silence after a bombardment—death—a night in a Casualty Clearing Station. These and many a jolly evening at some place behind the lines. Wasted years—never !! I wonder once again what the lasting effect of this life will be on the women who have taken part in it. Last night Lena Ashwell's Concert Party was down, and that I suppose set me thinking. The nurses and V.A.D.s—of them I have written—but of the others, what will this mean? I was talking to one of them the other night, as I talk to all and sundry, trying to see their point of view, and how I wonder what the result will be, for life here is stripped of its finery, and often lies in primitive nakedness. Will women be raised or not among those who have not, like the nurses, seen the price of suffering? Their outlook on life must be

widened, but sometimes I think the widening for some may be too sudden. The strong will undoubtedly be strengthened. Happy are they who, no longer seeing their youth's ideal, have the courage to stumble blindly forward along the stony paths. For oh ! the pleasant valley lands are calling, and one so easily forgets the heights.

XLIX

I'VE had my Medical Board, and am now waiting for the result. We are living in a week of gales and driving rain when one's tent sways and rocks, and one pictures terrible accidents in the night, and when everything is damp. Strange how in old days one was careful about sheets being thoroughly aired, while now one sleeps in blankets that are wet and clammy to the touch, and apparently one is none the worse for it. Were we a little too coddly in old times? Anyway the weather keeps Fritz away, and we have not seen him since Sunday.

If ——'s grave is where you think it is, I can describe the place pretty well from memory. Leaving the fringe of civilisation at the village of M——, you go along a

well-shaded road where it forks to north and south, taking the southern fork; on the left are the large gates of a farm-house, standing well back among the trees. A light railway runs beside the road; turning now to the left one approaches the village, built about two cross roads at right angles. On the left a piece of waste land and a wrecked gun emplacement, on the right a large and ugly slag-heap. A second light railway crosses the road, and beyond are the cross roads in the centre of the town. In front, and to the right, there is scarcely a house unhit, but to the left, civilians cling with the persistency of home love to their ruined homes. In front, less than a mile away, is the ruined and deserted village of —, but the greatest contrast is the road running north and south. To the north shaded and peaceful, to the south shell-swept and pitted. In front a rolling wilderness, behind a pleasant pasture land. Such is the place where —'s grave lies. There is little of interest, and life goes on just the same.

L

L EAVE—sweet word—not definite but probable—a whole fortnight! As I expected, I have been passed Permanent Base and am looking for a job.

Looking back, one forgets the horrors and hardships, and one sees only the convivial side of life, happy dug-out days—a strange phrase, except to those who, looking back to some cushy dug-out, remember happy half-hours, snatched as it were from the very feet of death.

Once again, one wonders what will be the outcome of it all to those millions of men and women who, hemmed in by the limitations of their work-a-day life, found contentment which we—luckier ones, perhaps—with a broadened outlook could not

understand. Will the present generation ever know contentment again, or will there come to them in the silence of the sleep time a vague yearning for "Life" again? To me, that is the problem of the generation, which must fill the minds of thinking men.

What an age to have lived in! to have seen the chaos of civilisation as it crashed from the pedestal on which it had been set by a purblind race! To find once again the idol shattered, and ground to dust—but from this very dust of broken idols shall rise again a greater race, for mixed with the tears of suffering humanity it shall form a clay that shall endure. Dust and tears—and from them a solid foundation. Somewhere in the last pages of *A Tale of Two Cities* is a passage that runs something like this (I quote from memory of six years ago): "I see a beautiful city and a brave people rising from the abyss, and in their struggles to be truly free, in their hopes and fears, for long, long years to come, I see the evil of this day, and of the

future of which this day is but the present birth, wiped out."

We stand, perhaps, in the darkest hour in the history of this planet—the darkest hour, yet to some at any rate there comes already the promise of the dawn. Things are out of perspective, that is all, and even those who have lost, or seem now to have lost, their all, will see the beauty of the dawn.

A new Faith is coming to Mankind—I purposely say Faith and not Religion, for the two are as different as a wedding is from a marriage. A finer, fuller, freer Faith devoid of dogma and creed, of ritual and form. Yes, of Temple even—as Browning said—

“ What’s the need of a temple
When the walls of the world are that? ”

A Faith whose prophets are the poets—whose Godhead is nature—cruel, relentless, beautiful nature. I know that I am at times an idealist, but idealist one must become, “ else I count this good no gain.” It

appears to me that the outcome of the war will either make a man an idealist, or just a calculating, relentless machine. The litany is wrong—is selfish, rather—when it prays for deliverance from battle and sudden death, for by these come attainment. In the early days of Kut a young officer, just a boy, was wounded and unconscious on the banks of the Tigris. The river rose, and he floated out—a stray bullet hit him and cut both optic nerves without killing him; for nearly two days he remained in the water. When in hospital he asked for and found contentment in the scent of violets.

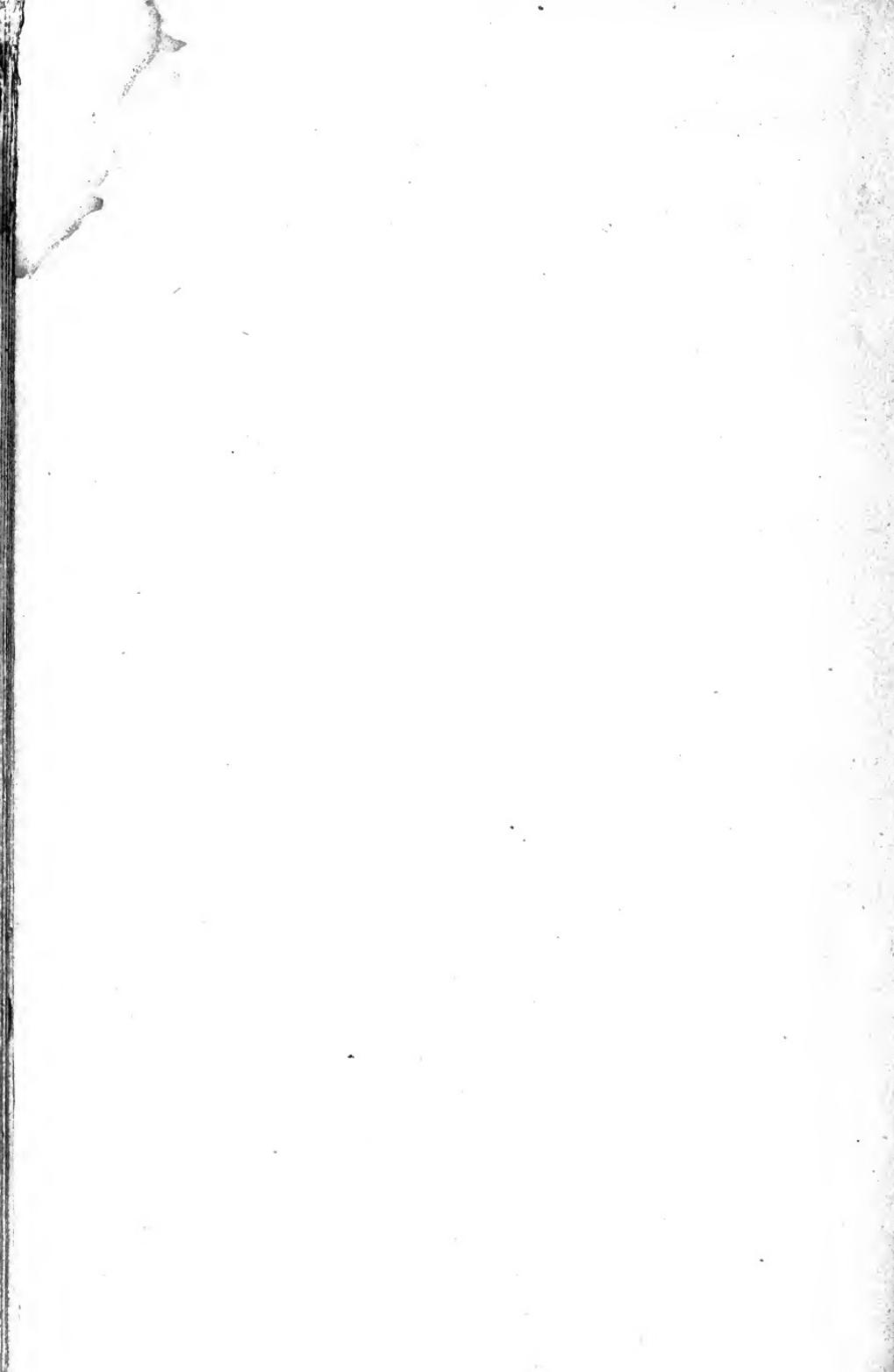
An Australian violinist lost both arms. In hospital he said, “Sister, if only I could play the violin once more.” Somehow they fixed one up and he played—crudely, of course—but after that there came no complaint. I could give you hundreds of cases, but these are all too common now. There’s your new Faith for you—and if ever we let mankind forget we shall commit the greatest crime on earth. Do you remember

Service's "The March of the Dead"? When Peace comes remember the lines—

" And while we stun with cheers our homing braves,
O God, in Thy great mercy let us never more forget
The graves they left behind, the bitter graves."

One word is wrong, for "bitter" one should read "glorious." Easy to sit and write, you'll say, when for oneself the dangers of war are all but over; easy to talk of others' sacrifices when one has none of one's own to make. But remember that to some of us it is harder to stay behind than to go forward, and those unfortunate ones who, through no fault of their own, have not been able to share the dangers, are most to be pitied—for what is one's own paltry life compared with the issues at stake?

THE END



"Oh! let's try and be cheerful for a change."
MORNING POST.

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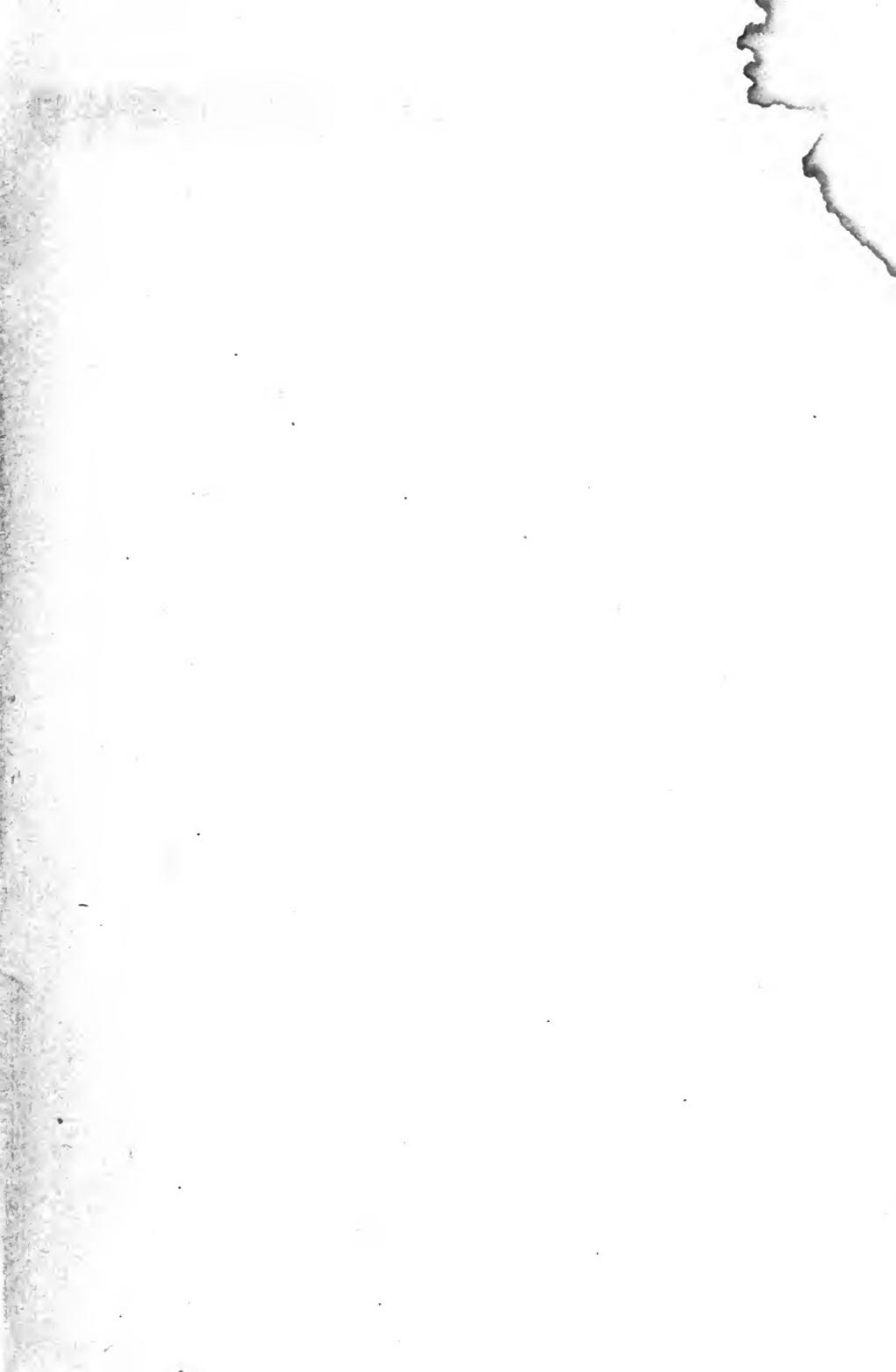
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